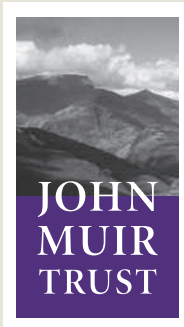


# JOHN MUIR TRUST JOURNAL

No 43 October 2007



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*Cover photo* From the summit of Todun near Reinigeadal in Harris, looking up Loch Seaforth. ©2007 James Smith Photography. One of many great vistas available from James at Oiseval Gallery, Brue, Isle of Lewis. [www.oiseval.co.uk](http://www.oiseval.co.uk).

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Opinions expressed in this journal do not necessarily represent the policies of the Trust.

## JOURNAL

### Editorial

Published every spring and autumn. Next Journal, February 2008.

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# ABSTRACTION

Hamish Brown



We tend to look at the big picture when in the Outdoors, and certainly the JMT areas offer spectacularly big skiescapes, landscapes and seascapes, but there is a great deal of touching beauty to be seen in the small things: the glitter of dew on a ripe summer morning, watching a crab move among flowing weed through clear water, the circling of a tree by bracket fungi, fallen leaves making an abstract pattern on veined schist, snow turning a row of thistle heads into a serving of coupes maison... that sort of thing. Here then is a selection of what I regard as Natural Abstracts and I'm sure I'm not the only one who would choose them over any or all the recent Turner Prize winners!

*The abstracts come from:  
Falls of Orchy, Sutherland, St Andrews, Benarty, Butt of Lewis, Carn Glas-Choire, Steele's Knowe and Strath.*



● Author and mountaineer Hamish Brown is a long standing JMT member. Hamish's recent book is reviewed on page 26.



# More funds and more members sought in continuing campaign on renewables



John Harrison



John Humphries

From left: Schiehallion across Loch Rannoch; shieling ruins at the head of Loch Seal on Lewis, a beautiful area which would be very badly affected by both the Paicr and Beinn Mhor wind turbine schemes.

**T**HE JOHN MUIR TRUST'S CURRENT 'WILD LANDSCAPES' appeal will both raise funds and boost membership, so as to meet the growing challenges to wild land from renewable energy schemes.

It is the most concerted media campaign the Trust has run.

Nearly 11,000 members and supporters received the appeal leaflet in late September. Banner adverts appeared in online editions of *The Herald* and *The Scotsman*, with further promotion on [outdoorsmagic.com](http://outdoorsmagic.com). December issues of *Trail* and *Country Walking* magazines are carrying editorial, and adverts or inserts. The Trust's previous 'renewables' leaflet and recruitment letter were door-dropped to about 10,000 households along the Beaully-Denny power line corridor.

Our most recent intervention in the power line inquiry was about its effect in the neighbourhood of Schiehallion, whose eastern side the JMT has owned since 1999. As we went to press, JMT director Nigel Hawkins was ready to give evidence to the inquiry's local Perth & Kinross session.

The pylon line in this area will sweep across views to, and from, Schiehallion. It runs 3 miles east from the summit, and the 65 m (200 ft) pylons would be potentially visible for much of the usual way up the hill, which the Trust has just restored. Nigel challenged the official environmental statement about the effect of the line. Our opinion is that 'with a handful of viewpoint wirescapes and even fewer photomontages, [it] does not do justice to the landscape and visual impacts'.

The Trust would like the Reporters to the inquiry to make a site visit to the Schiehallion area.

JMT's policy officer Helen McDade spoke previously at the inquiry's strategic session, and also protested at the Inverness session (about the Tomich-Dundreggan section and the Corrieyairack Pass), and the Newtonmore session (about the Feagour-Dalwhinnie and Drumochter Pass areas).

While the Beaully-Denny inquiry takes most staff and trustee time at present, the Trust has to be ready to make the case for wild land at other Scottish locations, especially in Lewis where three

very large industrial wind developments would be seen from much of Lewis and part of Harris, and would damage peatland and harm wildlife.

The campaign is being co-ordinated by Sam Bamber. He said that 'Most people have joined the Trust on the strength of our wild land purchases, principles of safeguarding wild land, and our work with local communities. This is a new appeal on a complex issue.

'The 10,000 members of the JMT can do a lot by donating vital funds towards our campaigning work, and can help raise awareness by tracking down local newspapers and newsletters and, ideally, approaching them to see if we can gain any editorial or free advert space.'

● Helen, [policy@jmt.org](mailto:policy@jmt.org), Sam, [recruit@jmt.org](mailto:recruit@jmt.org), or [www.jmt.org/wild-landscapes](http://www.jmt.org/wild-landscapes).

The JMT's renewable energy policy is at [www.jmt.org/policies](http://www.jmt.org/policies).

See also: *Director's Notes, page 9; Harris and Lewis, cover feature, from page 18.*

## Sleeping around on all Scotland's islands



John Humphries

Baggers and other assorted list-tickers have been joined by island sleepers, following the lead of Yorkshireman Andy Strangeway, who in August became the first person to sleep overnight on all 162 Scottish islands of over 40 ha area.

On 28/29 August Andy 'completed' on Soay in St Kilda. He has given his name to the activity. His progress is well documented on [www.island-man.co.uk](http://www.island-man.co.uk) and his adventures are featured in the magazine *Scottish Islands Explorer*.

Andy's tally includes North Rona and pictured

here is Leac Mhor Fianuis, the part of that remote isle where Frank Fraser Darling secured his hut while undertaking research in the 1930s.

• Even stranger – the surname 'Strangeway' originates from 'strang was' which means a person who lives in a place prone to flooding by 'strong wash'.

## Nevis memorials to be removed

Large numbers of memorial plaques are still being left on the summit of Ben Nevis.

The Nevis Partnership recently decided after considerable consultation to remove all memorials from the summit and to discourage new ones.

But despite widespread publicity, plaques are still being glued to rocks and new cairns are being built, mostly to commemorate those who have died and who have expressed a love for Ben Nevis.

The Chairman of the Nevis Partnership, outdoor writer and broadcaster Cameron McNeish, has expressed dismay at the continuing practice. He said: 'I'm sure people are leaving these things in good faith and are unaware that there are now alternative arrangements in place to enable departed relatives and friends to be remembered in a tangible way, but the fact of the matter is that any new plaque or memorial that is left on Ben Nevis will be removed and put into storage until identified by the owner.'

Existing plaques will be disposed of only after a concerted effort has been made to contact those responsible for placing them. In their place is a collective memorial and place of contemplation, in the form of a stone seat and cairn among trees near the visitor centre in Glen Nevis. It looks towards the mountain.

During the autumn of 2006 and the early summer of 2007 over 50 plaques were removed from the summit area. In only a few cases has it been possible to identify the person commemorated. For most there is no evidence why the memorial had been placed on Ben Nevis or if the person had ever climbed the mountain. Some are believed to commemorate a pet rather than a person.



*Sandy Maxwell writes*— In North Lewis, JMT volunteers were welcomed in late summer by Ranger Julie Sievewright and Chairman Norman Thompson to Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn (Galson Estate Trust) along with our partnerships manager, Mick Blunt. Tasks included painting the hide at the Loch Stiapabhat Local Nature Reserve, gathering clover seeds from the machair, dry stone walling at Galson Farm and work around the world famous play park at Eoropie: removing invasive plants such as butterbur and monkey flower from the burn, finishing off a dry stone seat and painting some of the picnic benches.

*Pictures L–R* Lighthouse at Butt of Lewis at sunset; moonlight view from the tents near there; road testing the Eoropie stone bench *all Alan Scott*. For the following week the focus moved to the North Harris Trust where we helped them to plant around 12,000 trees as part of their Glen Langadale forestry project. Battling through the rain and midges while the rest of the UK was bathing in glorious sunshine we made a dent in the 38,000 mixed broadleaf trees that the NHT will eventually plant in this beautiful and remote glen. We look forward to working with both Trusts in 2008!

## Recruitment man



Tasked with membership recruitment for the rest of 2007, **Sam Bamber** got used to tackling challenges as coordinator of last year's epic Journey for the Wild.

Sam has worked for the Trust for four years as manager of the Activities Programme. The target of recruiting 20,000 new members to the Trust over the next 5–10 years is 'ambitious, but essential to strengthen the Trust for the future'.

• Sam takes over from **Fiona Allan** who has moved on down – by emigrating to Australia.

## Help Scotland's bird atlas

Have buzzards continued to expand their range? Are cuckoos declining? Where do snipe winter?

From November, volunteers will cover Scotland's 1011 10-km squares to help answer these questions. Bird Atlas 2007–11 will show how recent changes in the countryside have affected our birds. The results will form the basis for future bird conservation.

It's easy to take part either by recording the birds in any 2x2-km square (two hourly visits in summer and winter) or by sending in any bird records you note whilst out walking in any 10-km square.

Check [www.birdatlas.net](http://www.birdatlas.net) or contact Scottish organiser Bob Swann, 07919 378876, [bob.swann@bto.org](mailto:bob.swann@bto.org).

## Heritage paths project

People will be able to find out more about their heritage at the same time as enjoying the outdoors, thanks to a three-year project launched by ScotWays, the Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society.

ScotWays three-year Heritage Paths Project will enter heritage paths in a national database covering their history and heritage value as well as surveys and maps. Volunteers will be involved in researching and surveying the routes. Information will be on the internet and in leaflets and a book, and maps and signposts will encourage users. A full-time project officer will lead the work.

Among Scotland's best known heritage paths are:

- The Corrieairack Pass – a Wade road from Laggan to Fort Augustus.
- The Lairig Ghru, in the Cairngorm mountains – probably the best-known high pass in Scotland, formerly used by drovers taking cattle between Deeside and Speyside.
- The Herring Road – route from Dunbar to Lauder used by fishwives selling fish.
- Cauldstane Slap – old drove road from Mid Calder to West Linton over the Pentland Hills, which continues on to Peebles and St Mary's Loch. It is marked on Roy's map of 1755 and was used by Bonnie Prince Charlie escaping from Hanoverian soldiers in 1746.

- St Cuthbert's Way – a pilgrim's route from Melrose to Lindsfarne.

ScotWays Chairman George Menzies commented: 'We are delighted that both Scottish Natural Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund have recognised the importance of this project and have given it substantial grant funding (£60,000 from SNH and £50,000 from HLF).

'We are fortunate that, throughout Scotland, there are still so many routes of great heritage interest. South of the border, many routes like these have long since disappeared under tarmac and concrete.'

## Muirshiel windfarm

*From the Scottish Council for National Parks' newsletter:*

'The fight to save the Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park from industrialisation through windfarm development received a significant boost recently when the Corlic Hill windfarm was finally refused by Scottish ministers nearly two years after they received the Reporter's recommendations. This degree of procrastination should never be allowed to happen again and efforts through Freedom of Information, to make sure that it doesn't, are likely to continue.'

### Next, please

*The JOURNAL is changing its spring publication date from April to February.*

# HF Holidays





## Award milestone in Wales

The John Muir Award celebrated its 10,000th Award in Wales on 17 August.

Congratulations to **Clare Higgins**, 14, from Milton Keynes, who received her certificate (above) from Sir Meuric Rees, former chairman of the Outward Bound Wales board of governors.

Clare was on a 3-week Outward Bound Wales summer classic course at the Aberdyfi Centre. The young people there had the opportunity to explore the mountains and waters of Snowdonia, learned about the environmental pressures in the area and helped with conservation on a local farm.

Hugo Iffla, John Muir Award manager for Wales said: 'This represents the growing importance of the John Muir Award in Wales, and the growing partnership with Outward Bound. Participation offers opportunities to raise awareness of the natural environment and sustainability issues.'

## Finance moves north

*Alison Russell, head of finance & administration, reports:* **Nicola Wylie**, our finance assistant, moved on to pastures new in August and is now working closer to home in Colinton. Nicola always brought a 'can do' attitude to her work and she will be sorely missed by me, other Trust staff and all who phone into our Leith office where she was based.

We have moved the finance function out of Edinburgh to Pitlochry, the Trust's registered office. This is already saving travel time, costs and emissions. The good news is that Nicola's replacement has already started with the Trust – **Frances Logan** lives locally and started with us in September. Her email address is [accounts@jmt.org](mailto:accounts@jmt.org). Frances is a highly qualified individual and is settling in

well.

On an ecological front, four Pitlochry staff members are now in an active car sharing scheme. We are already reducing our mileage by up to 388 miles per week which allowing for the odd day off is in the region of 15,000 – 20,000 miles per annum.

## Volunteers and JMT

Trustees recently agreed that volunteers should play a larger role in the work of the Trust, provided this can be done in a way that produces clear benefit. The management team will now look at how an increased input from volunteers could be managed.

Since 1983 volunteers have been involved in all aspects of JMT work, from the governance of the Trust, to mailing merchandise, doing conservation, leading adventurous activities, delivering the John Muir Award and even painting the ceiling!

JMT's Articles of Association say that we should 'encourage voluntary participation in the conservation and renewal of wild places'.

● **If you're interested in this, or if you have experience in managing volunteers that you think would help the Trust, please contact Sam Baumber, 0131 554 0114 or [recruit@jmt.org](mailto:recruit@jmt.org).**

## Helping hand from Morvern

From the Morvern peninsula, south of Ardnamurchan, **Scottish Linen**, who are advertising in this *Journal*, produce a range of high-quality linens with Scottish themes, such as Scots pine and thistles.

Owner **Deborah Watson** is donating part of the profit on sales to the John Muir Trust and we are very grateful for this support. [www.scottishlinen.co.uk](http://www.scottishlinen.co.uk).

## Welcome and unwelcome visitors at Sandwood

Cathel Morrison, Sandwood conservation manager, is overseeing a steady enhancement of the car park at Blairmore, the gateway to the Sandwood Bay track.

'I have put up our new notice board on the wall of the toilet block. It has been very kindly made by students of Thurso Technical College free of charge – they even supplied the materials. Thanks to them and to Kevin Sutherland, the teacher who organised it all for me. We had a volunteer work party doing a dyking course in August. Last year we built a seat and a shelter for the litter bin, we ended up with some stones left over and with the first seat proving so popular decided to build another to balance things up. At the same time the John Muir Award kids involved in the activities programme shifted the donations box from the carpark entrance to the side of the building.'

Less welcome visitors are the dreaded millipedes who have plagued the estate for 3–4 years. 'They reared their scaly little bodies once again, to the annoyance of Droman, Balchrack and Blairmore residents. The problem got quite a lot of media exposure including TV. Many suggestions for a cure were proposed and both JMT and SNH were consulted, but we're no further forward. They have now retired to their winter quarters and we're hoping that next year they will decide to take a foreign vacation rather than pestering us.'

● *If you have an answer to the millipede problem, please get in touch.*

## Quinag deer management



The JMT now has a comprehensive deer management plan for Quinag estate which is aimed at a reduction in overall deer grazing pressures on the estate over a 5-year period. This ties in with our aims and objectives within the Wildland Biodiversity project. This current season is the first year of the plan, which was produced in conjunction with the neighbouring Ardvar estate, and a total of 45 stags and 45 hinds plus associated calves are to be culled.

JMT has reached a close working relationship with Ardvar estate and they are undertaking this year's cull on Quinag.

## JMT will help with Knoydart woodland restructuring

The JMT has committed to contributing £10,000 over the next two years towards the Knoydart Forest Trust's Forest Access and Regeneration project. This is a substantial project aimed primarily at restructuring the Inverie woodlands from exotic mono-cultural conifer plantation to a mosaic of native, mixed and restored ancient woodland, and growing a sustainable community asset including growing local-scale quality timber and improved public access.

The JMT funding is targeted towards:

- Native woodland regeneration
- Restoration of ancient native woodland through removal of *Rhododendron ponticum* and gradual removal of exotic conifers
- Conversion of mono-cultural conifer plantation to mixed woodland
- Eradication of *Rhododendron ponticum*



## INVITATION TO A TREK

COMMUNITY ACTION NEPAL is recruiting for a charity trek in 2008 in the Helambu Region of Nepal. Easily reached from the Kathmandu valley, this is a hard but immensely rewarding trek, suitable for fit walkers of average ability. The ridge-top trail leads through areas increasingly influenced by Buddhism and affords views of Annapurna and Everest on clear days.

CAN was founded by JMT Lifetime Achievement Award holder Doug Scott, and operates mainly in the poorer middle hill regions of Nepal. Its goal is to bring long-term benefits to the lives of the rural population, focusing on sustainable health and education projects. The £1600 trek fee covers flights, transfers, accommodation and all food while trekking. Trekkers are asked to pledge to raise £750 or more to support CAN's projects in Nepal – fundraising support is available.

Community Action Nepal, Warwick Mill, Warwick Bridge, Carlisle CA4 8RR, info@canepal.com, 01228 564488, www.canepal.org.uk.

## Wilderness writing 2008

Following on from last year's success the JMT is again running a writing competition at the Fort William Mountain Festival 2008. The brief is simply a piece of writing about a wild place, up to 1200 words in length.

The Arvon Centre near Beaulieu has come forward to offer a place on either a retreat or one of its well known writing courses as a prize. Another prize is offered from The Orkney Croft on Hoy.

One of the 2007 prize-winning writers, Linda Cracknell, is running a writing workshop at the festival. Linda received a Creative Scotland Award to complete a series of 'journey-essays' which link walking and writing. She says that 'Walking is vital to my imagination and creative process. Through a series of workshops at festivals, I hope to stimulate others to link creativity, writing and "wilderness" experiences.'

The closing date is 11 February 2008. For an entry form and further details about the competition and

the writing workshop go to [www.mountainfestival.co.uk](http://www.mountainfestival.co.uk) or contact Alison Austin at [nevis@jmt.org](mailto:nevis@jmt.org).

- Read a 2007 prize-winning piece by Alison Napier on page 11.

## Hear all about it...National parks

Does your local society or special interest group have meetings addressed by outside speakers? Sixty volunteers acting for the Council for National Parks (CNP) are on hand to offer illustrated talks almost anywhere in England & Wales. They show the Parks' beauty, diversity and cultural heritage; and explain challenges like nature conservation, sustainable development, quarrying, energy, tourism, transport and military training.

The volunteers charge only travel costs, though some donation to CNP is strongly encouraged.

Information and bookings: Adrian Thornton (himself a JMT member), Phoenix Cottage, Cassington, Witney, Oxon OX29 4DL; phone 01865-880359.

Berghaus ad bleeds 3 mm L and foot

## Good news for water voles – and JMT



Dick Bahary

Staff and volunteers from the JMT's Wildland Biodiversity Project conducted a water vole survey on Ben Nevis estate this summer. *Liz Auty from the project writes:* Several colonies were found and these signs of activity are great news for the Trust and for the voles!

Traditionally seen as a lowland species, Britain's most threatened mammal is surviving in upland refuges where the American Mink predator is less likely to venture. Studies by Xavier Lambin and colleagues at the University of Aberdeen have found water vole colonies in patches of suitable habitat in upland areas, part of larger populations known as

'metapopulations'. Even in these harsh places, voles have been known to travel more than 2 km when dispersing and looking for a breeding area. Reduced grazing pressure should improve habitats for this species, and the project will survey for water voles on other Trust properties.

Rebecca Denny ran a training day in the area to help staff to look for water vole signs and habitats in an upland area, conduct surveys and find out more about their biology and distribution.

- *More about the wildland biodiversity project in the February 2008 Journal.*

## Astonishing weather in the Fort

*Alison Austin, Nevis conservation officer, has interesting news for people from the south:*

The news this year was full of it – the floods, the rain – so a normal summer in Fort William surely?

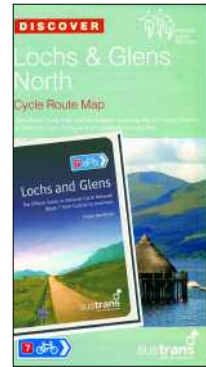
Well, although the rest of the country suffered unusually high rainfall I was not convinced we had any more than usual here, so I checked with NTS Glencoe who have a weather station – and yes, the rainfall was not particularly higher than average.

What has been different is the temperature; it has been much cooler with a lot more cloudy days here in Fort William. So not many days for wearing shorts – but the midges usually put paid to that anyway!

### Membership line

*Reminder: enquiries about existing JMT membership should go to our membership secretary Jane Anderson.*

*Jane is on 0845 458 8356 and membership@jmt.org.*



**Lochs and Glens** Sustrans, the sustainable transport group, brought out maps and a guide this year to National Cycle Network Route 7, Carlisle to Inverness. Both the guide and the two (north and south) route maps are entertaining and informative to walkers and drivers as well as bikers, especially on the all-important business of getting in, or round, towns on the route. [www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk), 0845 113 0065.

your walks ad



# Love the Wild?

Help keep it wild.  
Join the John Muir Trust



The John Muir Trust protects some of the most iconic and inspiring wild places in the UK. Join us today and become a guardian of wild land.

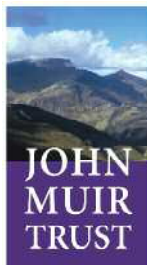
### The John Muir Trust safeguards

Ben Nevis - Schiehallion - Sandwood Bay  
Quinag, Sutherland - Red Cuillins, Isle of Skye  
Ladhar Bheinn, Knoydart  
in partnership with local communities.

Help us **conserve** wild land for nature and people,  
**campaign** against threats to it and **inspire**  
everyone to value wild places.

## JOIN US TODAY!

Receive a **FREE** print of Bla Bheinn, Isle of Skye (above), land protected by the John Muir Trust. (Print size 12" x 10")



## BECOME A GUARDIAN OF WILD LAND

Annual **£24** Family **£36** Life **£550**

Please send your details with a cheque to 'John Muir Trust',  
41 Commercial Street, Edinburgh EH6 6JD,  
or call 0131 554 0114 and mention this advert

Join online [www.jmt.org](http://www.jmt.org) for only **£2** per month



## Lots of fun in the John Muir Award 10th Birthday Auction

Bid for some very special items in our e-auction, to be held from 20 Oct–20 Nov. See links from [www.johnmuiraward.org](http://www.johnmuiraward.org). Lots include, when going to press:

- ★ Leo Houlding's micro-fleece worn on his Everest Summit day – signed and dated (unsure if washed).
- ★ An original cartoon by Steven Appleby (above)
- ★ Two David Bellamy paintings completed on the Trust's Journey for the Wild
- ★ Watercolour painting by landscape and portrait artist (and Trustee) Will Williams
- ★ Winter training course at Glenmore Lodge
- ★ Signed copy of 'Let My People Go Surfing' by Yvon Chouinard.
- ★ A one-day conservation blitz from Fife Air Cadets Conservation Group – create a pond, clear an area, biodiversity survey....
- ★ Join geologist Angus Miller from Geowalks for a day walk exploring rocks and landscapes, anywhere in south/central Scotland, date by agreement, for an individual, family or group of up to 15.
- ★ Framed Peter Cairns photo ('mist laden pine forest at dawn')
- ★ Watercolour of Schiehallion by Hilda C Duggan, donated by Dick Clark.
- ★ A day on a JMT property of your choice for 1 or 2, Mar/June 2008, with a JMT ranger. Biodiversity.work at first hand.
- ★ John Muir treasures: 'John of the Mountains' (journals, hardback printed 1938) — John Muir Tribute CD — Californian quarter, John Muir and Half Dome, 2005 — Limited edition stamp.

### Scottish Linen ad.

Use 0.25 pt border box.

TIFF and original JPEG supplied.





# FUNDS NEEDED TO OPPOSE THREATS TO WILD LAND

*Fundraising and recruitment through the Wild Landscape Appeal*

**W**ITH ALARM BELLS RINGING even more loudly all over the country over the threat to wild landscapes posed by intrusive developments including large-scale onshore industrial wind farms, the Trust is gearing up again on the campaigning front.

A Wild Landscape Appeal has been made to members and other supporters to consider contributing towards the cost of mounting effective challenges to those developments which would cause the most harm to our wild places.

At the same time the Trust is working to convince politicians and other decision makers of the need for changes in national landscape planning legislation and protection.

With threats to the environment through climate change and global warming the Trust is a 100 per cent advocate for green energy – but it must be provided in ways that do not cause other harm to our environment and especially the qualities of our finest wild land which make it of such national and international importance.

The culprits are those who propose large scale industrial wind turbine developments on, or very close to, important wild areas.

There is a need for a 'green energy mix' with energy coming from a range of green sources including onshore wild farms but these must be sensitively sited.

We fear that in the dash for green energy too many eggs are being placed in one basket – onshore wind farms – and that more needs to be invested in energy conservation and in securing energy from the sea and bio fuels, and from small scale options.

The Trust lends its support to sensitively located community renewable energy projects such as the three turbines proposed by the North Harris Trust but is opposed to large scale schemes such as the hundreds of turbines threatening the Lewis landscapes.

The Trust has devoted a great deal of its resources to opposing the proposed new giant power line marching down the spine of Scotland from Beaully to Denny. In doing so we have proposed practical alternatives such as sub-sea links, or upgrade and extension of the existing east coast connector.

Our members tell us time and again that protecting wild landscapes is the number one reason they joined the Trust. We hope members who already support that cause through being members can give further support to the Trust in facing the challenges ahead.

A new leaflet has been sent to all members and supporters and this is also available on line at [www.jmt.org](http://www.jmt.org). Just click on Wild Landscape Appeal. People who are not members but who wish to sign up for this campaign can become members online.

Members who feel strongly about the threats to wild land are encouraged to consider responding to the appeal for vitally needed funds and at the same time to recruit new members to the cause by joining the Trust.

## **Putting the Case for Wild Land to the New Government**

The Trust is looking forward to working with the new Government in Scotland and putting forward the case for wild land at every opportunity.

The new SNP government is a minority administration and so needs the support of other parties to get legislation through Parliament although many executive matters, and the whole style and priorities of Government in Scotland will be determined by the SNP.

Through the work of our policy officer Helen McDade, receptions we have held at the Parliament in Edinburgh, engagement with last year's Journey for the Wild and other events we have established a dialogue with key politicians of all parties and we wish to build on this in encouraging policies which safeguard and extend wild land.

A great benefit of having the Parliament in Scotland is that it has increased the accessibility of politicians and civil servants and advisers. We have found widespread expressions of support for wild land and its importance nationally and internationally but the need is to encourage and help politicians turn that into practical action.

This was a skill demonstrated so ably by John Muir in the United States and it is right that we should aspire to follow in his footsteps.

*Continued over*



Keith Brane

### **Award Hits Magnificent Milestones**

Minister for Children and Early Years Adam Ingram MSP joined us for the celebrations marking the presentation of the 50,000th John Muir Award.

12 year-old Samantha Pettigrew (Right in picture above) received the award from the Minister at Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park and it seemed very appropriate that the 50,000th award in the name of the founder of national parks should be presented at Scotland's first national park.

I am sure John Muir would have been delighted with the project Samantha and her group from the Helensburgh-based Backchat Youth Project were doing not only experiencing the lochs, woods and mountains of the park but learning about the environmental pressures and how they could help to protect this special landscape for future generations to enjoy. Taking part had been a real eye-opener for the group, some of whom had not had the opportunity before to visit a wild place.

Mr Ingram presented award certificates to the group and said he was pleased to see how much the young people enjoyed taking part.

Congratulations went to Toby Clark, JMA West of Scotland manager, Rob Bushby, JMA manager, and all those involved helping reach this magnificent milestone.

Only a week later another milestone was reached with the presentation of the 10,000th award in Wales. This took place at the Aberdyfi Centre and the recipient was 14 year-old Clare Higgins from Milton Keynes.

We welcomed Sir Meuric Rees, former chairman of the Outward Bound Board for Wales, who in presenting the award to Clare paid tribute to the principles of the award.

Congratulations were also due to Hugo Iffla, JMA manager for Wales, and all those who have helped achieve the remarkable total of 10,000 awards in Wales.

### **New Trustees Welcomed**

Three new Trustees made an excellent start with the Trust when they headed to Knoydart – which played a key role in our formation – for the first Trustees meeting following their election this year.

They were solicitor Walter Semple, from Glasgow, fresh from doing battle on behalf of JMT and others at the Beaulay-Denny power line inquiry; John Hutchison, former Lochaber Area manager for the Highland Council, and Will Boyd-Wallis, land manager with the Cairngorms National Park and former policy and partnerships manager with JMT. John and Will were on very familiar territory – especially John who played a vital role in the community buyout of the estate when he was executive secretary for the Knoydart Foundation.



On the summit of Schiehallion during the 2006 Journey for the Wild: John Swinney MSP, now Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth, and Nigel Hawkins with, foreground, Pete Wishart MP and a John Muir Award participant from East Ayrshire's Doon Academy and Cumnock Academy School Link Programme.

The meeting at Inverie Hall was part of a weekend of walking and talking shared with the Knoydart Foundation. Trustees were very impressed with the progress made by the foundation in the management of the estate since the buyout over eight years ago, and wished them well in the future.

### **Thanks to SNH**

I am pleased to report that SNH has entered into a three year funding agreement with the Trust relating to many of our key activities in land management and education. This follows the signing of a Concordat between SNH and JMT agreeing to work together on a whole range of matters of mutual interest.

The three year support from SNH helps us to plan projects and activities for the longer term and is very much appreciated by Trustees and staff.

A Private Member's debate in the Scottish Parliament on the conduct of the Beaulay-Denny Inquiry was held on 19 September and we are delighted by the way it went. The debate was brought by Murdo Fraser, Conservative MSP, and, whilst it focused on the inquiry process, MSPs made very clear their major concerns about the proposed electricity line's effects. Excellent contributions came from MSPs of all parties who all expressed their concern. The Trust's contribution, alongside other objectors, in bringing forward the case was highlighted. The credit for this goes to our policy officer Helen McDade who has done a superb job in marshalling our forces. I think this is a real marker for the Minister, Jim Mather. He replied to the debate (there is no vote on Private Member's debates) and whilst he cannot comment on the substantive issues, and said that the Inquiry must finish its work, the views expressed and the presence of more than fifty objectors in the gallery will have made an impression.



# THE EXPLORER'S GUIDE TO GEODHA MEIRIL

by ALISON NAPIER

*'The Explorer's Guide to Geodha Meiril' won second place in the 'Wild Journeys Wild Places' writing competition held by the Trust as part of the Fort William Mountain Festival 2007. For the 2008 competition, see the News pages. Alison Napier lives in Sutherland.*

THE FADING, LICHEN-COVERED, and it must be said half-hearted 'No Unauthorised Access' sign nailed to the gate was begging us to ignore it... so we did. 'What does "un-otherised" mean?' asks my companion, a voracious reader. A good question. I will never lose my fear of involuntary trespass so I walk briskly but I suspect guiltily until we are round the first corner and out of sight of both the road and the 'big house'. My companion is eight year old Franny and she has no such anxieties. We are off to see the seals at Whiten Head and she has packed her new and 'to be grown into' rucksack with seal-spotting equipment. This consists of her small but effective binoculars, a bottle of Lucozade, four egg and tomato sandwiches, a Cadbury's creme egg, an apple, twelve (counted by her mother) Pringles and her doll Kirsty, also eight but less intact. Other than a Kirsty and some water for health my own pack is worryingly similar.

We stride on, River Hope surging seawards on our left. We are on a land-rover track. Franny leaps down to the river's edge to measure herself against the salmon fishers' rod stand, and then darts along their narrow path, as swift and colourful as a kingfisher in her multi-striped scarf. She has already covered twice as much ground as I. The track rises and falls and the river opens its arms to embrace the sea. Ahead of us the incoming tide from the Arctic collides with the unstoppable river in an orchestral clash of cymbals, throwing shimmering rainbow sprays up into the icy blues of the skies and seas. And Hope springs eternal.

It is nearly time to leave the land-rover track which is now doubling back on itself in the interests of fishing but not before we reach the ice house that pokes its head out of the hillside. Franny races inside fearlessly, Kirsty peeping anxiously from a side pocket of the rucksack, and I hover at the entrance, already smelling dampness and decomposing animal matter and wondering how many diseases a child can catch simultaneously. 'It's cool! Can we have our picnic here?' I remind her that we are

joining the seals for lunch and we agree to perhaps take afternoon tea in the icehouse instead. And so we pick our way across a stream and find the footpath through the woods for the next stage of our journey.

Franny leaps ahead, skipping and dancing her way through the sunlit tunnel of overhanging rowans and silver birches, stopping only to collect treasures or to balance her way over the rivulets that cross our path. It is only a few hundred yards long, this part of the walk, but



Whiten Head in Sutherland seen across the mouth of Loch Eriboll.

it is a magical and secret world, the sea is sparkling mica glimpsed through the golden and ruby autumn colours, the rush of the river and the roar of the tide. Too soon we emerge again into waist-high bracken, head-high if you are eight, and after acknowledging the bothy at Inverhope we edge down a steep sheep-track to the shore. From here I can see the line of our next route at the end of the beach heading back uphill and tempting as it is to simply sit down on a huge bleached beached log to watch the oyster-catchers and gulls scuttling backwards and forwards on the sand we have seals to meet. Franny, who has mercifully not yet attended a time-management seminar sits anyway and tugs her binoculars from her pack. 'Look! Look, see the penguins!' I look, already knowing that life has few such

*Continued over*



perfect moments. I explain reluctantly that the penguins perched like gowned pedagogues on a rocky outcrop are in fact cormorants but that they are surely related. We break into the Pringles to celebrate, ceremonially leaving one (of mine) as an offering. Simple rituals such as this my atheism leaves mercifully unchallenged.

After many minutes we set off again, and at the end of the beach I locate our next path, barely worthy of the name, a parting of the heather, a dark, springy route that climbs high above the beach and leads us to the seals. Far far ahead I can see Whiten Head, many miles beyond our destination today. Contentment today will be following this tentative little track as it climbs and dips, vanishes on a vast expanse of rock and reappears in the distance, worn down like cathedral steps by two centuries of cheviots

and the boots of intrepid seal spotters.

Suddenly I hear them, those eerily mournful yet magnificent moans and callings, echoing and re-echoing around their vaulted chamber, an unworldly sound that ricochets and reverberates down through the ages while tugging us forward like the lure of the sirens. We are utterly alone in this landscape of empty moors and pounding seas, and the sound of the seals mingles with the crashing crescendo of the waves against the rocks beneath us. 'Are we there?' whispers my companion, still and watchful now. I take her hand and we creep along the thin path until it widens into a natural peat-covered ledge high high above the tiny bay. Silently, holding our breath, we find our binoculars and scan the world below. Dozens of grey seals, females and pups, flopped on the shingle, nestled up against the cliff, or sheltering at the entrances to miniature caves, are spread out a hundred feet below us. Others, perhaps the males, are resting on the off-shore rocks and being washed by the tide. I have visited this spot many autumns in succession and it never loses its mystery. To have stumbled

upon a lost civilisation would not inspire greater awe. And the seals call and the gulls circle, we are border-dwellers between land and sea, and Franny simply gazes and gazes in wonder.

We stayed for almost an hour, though many more would have passed unnoticed, and we ate our lunch. We spoke in whispers and often did not watch the bay at all, instead lying back in the deep heather, arms and legs outstretched like two St Andrew's Crosses. We moulded into the soft peaty ground and the heather wrapped us in its rough tweedy blanket. We stared up at the clouds as they drifted by, cumuli the shapes of seals and sailors and ships, of rocks and waves and caves, drifting wisps of weed and weather.

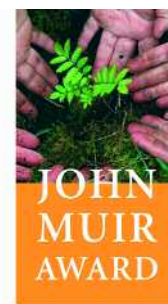
There is no offering magnificent enough for this occasion I think but as if reading my thoughts my companion asks if she can leave her apple core. For the seals and the clouds and the cormorants. Of course, I reply, of course.

I would leave them my world and everything I own and it would never be enough.

## BERGHAUS



# THE FIRST TEN YEARS



Wild Places  
discover - explore  
conserve - share

*Rob Bushby, manager of the John Muir Award, outlines the journey so far of the Trust's main educational initiative.*

THE JOHN MUIR AWARD was officially launched in 1997. But its origins lie in the discussions of the John Muir Trust's education committee in 1994. 'Shouldn't more people be actively doing something for wild places?' ran their thinking. 'And shouldn't the Trust be trying to get more young people engaged in what John Muir was driving at?'

The challenge was clearly identified:

*'If conservation is to compete in the 'marketplace of awareness' with all the other issues fighting for people's attention, then it has to achieve a national profile and high status, rather than remaining a rather specialised hobby and recreational interest for a small and ageing group of people. The John Muir Trust believes that a prestigious Environmental Award Scheme is one way in which conservation awareness could be developed among a large group of people.'* \*

Trust member Graham White and the Trust's first education manager Dave Picken produced a feasibility study that at the time highlighted a very limited connection between youth and conservation – fewer than 0.1% of 12–24 year olds in Scotland were found to be 'doing something for wild places'. Confidence and competence were seen as key barriers – all that green stuff was seen as the domain of those with fleeces and beards.

So the John Muir Award was created to fill this gap. The brief was to create a mainstream, prestigious, accessible way of encouraging large numbers of people to get involved in a broad environmental agenda.

Two years of piloting and planning preceded its official launch by the Minister for the Environment Lord Lindsay at a ceremony in Dunbar.

### How does it work?

Four themes or Challenges were identified that reflected John Muir's life and represent the structure of a holistic experience – Discover, Explore, Conserve, Share. To achieve a John Muir Award what's required is a range of activity that meets these challenges.

One of the strengths that users identify is the flexibility of this approach – we aren't overtly prescriptive about the activity that's proposed, other than asking for a minimum time commitment. This also makes the Award accessible to a wide variety of groups, individuals and locations – wild places can be school grounds, gardens, country parks or more remote mountain ranges.

Often, groups will use this framework as a starting point for planning a programme or journey – staff, leaders, teachers, instructors and volunteers are a key audience for the John Muir Award, as well as individual participants. Alternatively an established programme will use this structure to add focus, context or activity in order to meet John Muir Award Challenges and to meet their own aims.

### Who are we working with?

We pride ourselves on the diversity of organisations and individuals that choose to participate. Over 1000 organisations have been involved – schools,

ranger services, youth groups, outdoor education centres, homeless charities, 65+ groups, expedition groups and families.

The Award is open to all. Some 25% of participants come from socially excluded backgrounds, and the Award's record of involving people from all walks of life is a real asset to the Trust.

Key partnerships have enabled focused work in Cumbria, Cairngorms and East Lothian. Cumbria Youth Alliance has hosted a John Muir Award team since 2003; support is in place from Friends of the Lake District, Lake District National Park Authority, 'V' Funding and Northern Rock Foundation until 2009. Cairngorms National Park Authority employ an Award Manager to help meet Park aims and have committed to this until 2010. A 10-year youthwork-focused partnership with the Rank Foundation and East Lothian Council recently came to an end.

*Continued over*

### The original aims

*\*The John Muir Award should be:*

- Non-competitive
- National within the UK
- Designed and delivered in partnership with a wide variety of other agencies
- Based on a common environmental agenda negotiated with other agencies
- Open and welcoming to all people regardless of age, sex, race and class
- Holistic: deliverable through the arts as well as the sciences
- Progressive and challenging
- Prestigious and high profile



*Clockwise from L: Lord Lindsay and companions on Dunbar beach after the Award was launched; the first John Muir Awards in Northern Ireland were gained by young people from Beechmount in Belfast Ulster Wildlife Trust; the Zawinski family, doing the Award and Journey for the Wild; Award participant on Greenteam work party, Oakbank, W Lothian Keith Brame.*

*\*John Muir Award Feasibility Study 1995.*

## MILESTONES

Pre-history (1995–1997)

**April 1995** Feasibility Study.  
Award piloted with Venture Scotland, Duke of Edinburgh's Award Edinburgh & Lothians, Highland Ecology Centre, The Green Team, East Lothian Council, North Lanarkshire Council.

**October 1995** First John Muir Awards presented to Venture Scotland.

**1996** Activities Programme launched.  
First training event.  
212 Awards presented.

Official history (1997 on)

- 1997** Official launch.  
Funding from Rank Foundation for 'Youth or Adult' worker in East Lothian.
- 1998** 758 Awards presented this year.
- 1999** 51 organisations using the Award.
- 2000** First Lifetime Achievement Award presented to broadcaster and champion for wild places Tom Weir.
- 2001** Two regional managers for Scotland appointed.
- 2002** Fifth birthday celebration at Holyrood, Edinburgh  
7000th Award presented by mountaineer Doug Scott.  
Manager appointed to run Award in Wales.
- 2003** Partnership with Cumbria Youth Alliance. Cairngorms National Park Authority employ Award manager.  
Study: 90% of Award providers agree that involvement raised awareness of John Muir.
- 2004** First UK-wide networking events – Gatherings – held in six locations. Cairngorms conservation guru Adam Watson presented with Lifetime Achievement Award.  
Publicity DVD produced.
- 2005** Scottish Education Minister Peter Peacock presents 20,000th John Muir Award to Rosie Maddock of Kellands School, Iverurie
- 2006** Doug Scott, first Briton to summit Everest and founder of Community Action Nepal, receives Lifetime Achievement Award.  
Over 50 John Muir Award groups participate in the John Muir Trust Journey for the Wild.
- 2007** 50,000th John Muir Award presented and 10,000th John Muir Award presented in Wales.  
Welsh language/bilingual materials produced.

Continued from page 13

## How does the Award fit in with the wider work of the Trust?

Whilst the purchase and management of iconic wild land has always been seen as the John Muir Trust's core business, the Award has helped the Trust to become known more widely, to be seen as actively engaging with a much wider audience, to help it to counter the potential charge of being an elitist landowner, and to add a youthful vigour to its portfolio of activity. It involves the Trust in the direct engagement of thousands of people per year in biodiversity awareness and responsible access.

As its key education initiative, the John Muir Award directly relates to the Trust's Articles of Association, in particular:

- Conserving wild places and their landscapes, both for their own sake and for the sustenance and inspiration they give to humanity
- Promoting an awareness and understanding of wild places for their own sake and for their value to the benefit of humanity
- Working with local communities and encouraging them to live in harmony with wild places
- Stimulating public support to help protect wild places
- Encouraging voluntary participation in the conservation and renewal of wild places.

## People first/nature first: the continuing challenge

The challenge identified in 1994 is still there. The message from Scottish Government in 2007 is remarkably similar to the one identified by the Trust in 1994:

*After years of dedicated resource, expertise and commitment from government, local authorities, non-governmental organisations, charities, trusts and schools, many people in Scotland remain distant from the pressing issues faced by nature and wildlife. Communications have tended towards the hard, scientific facts [nature first] rather than exploring and exploiting the broad motivations of the general public [people first]. As a consequence they have tended to attract a fairly specific group of people naturally drawn to the issues that biodiversity raises. Though this base is highly committed, it is not large or focussed enough to spur a mass behavioural change that sees more ordinary people 'out there' doing something about biodiversity issues.\**

Then as now, the John Muir Trust is one of the few national organisations actively working with individuals and organisations across the spectrum of society to explicitly promote the value of wild places.

\* Scottish Biodiversity Communications Strategy Framework. A Report to the Scottish Executive and Scottish Natural Heritage by Newhaven Communications 2007.



**Tom Weir, Adam Watson, Doug Scott: accepted the Trust's Lifetime Achievement Award.**

## WHO DOES IT? Award facts & figures

<b>Age</b>	Under 10	10%
	10–11	40
	12–16	30
	17–24	10
	Over 25	10
<b>Gender</b>	Male	53%
	Female	47
<b>Place</b>	Scotland	26,000
	England	12,500
	Wales	11,000
	Other	1500
<b>Total</b>		51,000

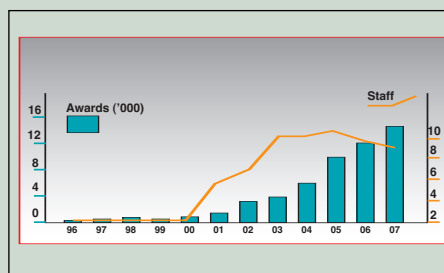
### Diversity...

During a single year John Muir Awards were achieved by:

a Ram, Lamb, and Bullock;  
a Hunter, Fisher, Shepherd, Horseman, Stalker, Ranger, Farmer, Shearer  
a Walker and a Gardener (in Fairweather);  
a Crane, Woodcock, Piper, Harrier,  
Gosling, Peacock, Falconer, Swan,  
Bunting, Martin, Heron, and Ducky;  
England, Wales, the Welsh and a Scott  
...and a John Muir.

### The numbers

Awards attained plotted against staff numbers, 1996–2007, below.





# FAMILY AWARD

*The Crane family's John Muir Award story, by PETE CRANE*



Most people who know even a little about the Cairngorms would readily agree that it is a special place. Around this ancient mountain core lie large tracts of native woodland, unpolluted lochs and burns, moorland and low intensity farmland. As one visitor put it, 'you're looking at a 7000-year love affair between a people and the land'.

Given five minutes with anyone, I could convince them of the area's special qualities. But, when it came to sharing my passion for the area with my children I lacked confidence. Sad to admit it but I felt that I needed props, a toolkit, a framework, something more than 'dad just going on about glaciers again.' I wanted something that would allow my children to discover for themselves what is so special about the Cairngorms. That's why as a family we decided to do the John Muir Award and focus our activity around the place in which we are so lucky to live.

When we started Joanna was four years old and Rachel was seven so enjoyment needed to be high on the agenda. With that in mind we planned a series of half day journeys exploring habitats of the Cairngorms, and to introduce some wildness into our own garden by planting native trees and an area of meadow.

These activities covered the discover, explore and conserve elements of the Award and we planned to share our experiences by writing diaries, drawing pictures and taking photographs that would eventually make a poster.

We mapped out the four days required activity but little did we know that our Award would last the whole summer and take us way beyond the Cairngorms to the summit of Clisham on Harris and the length of the Western Isles. John Muir started to crop up in almost everything we did last summer.

## Water

30th April. We canoed from Broomhill to Grantown. Rachel's diary reads, 'At the beginning I felt excited because I knew it was going to be really exciting. At the snack spot I felt hungry but not for long yum yum!' Enjoyment and enjoyment of food

were to become recurring themes. Jo remembered seeing sand martens, oyster catchers, herons and ducks of an unspecified species.

In September we returned to the Spey to canoe from Grantown to Cromdale and the hot summer provided several opportunities to immerse ourselves in the crystal clear waters of the Nethy, Feshie and Tilt. My lasting memory of the summer is of Rachel lying on her back in the Feshie like Baloo the Bear with not a care in the world.

## Mountains and moorland

6th May 2006. The weather forecast was good so we set out to climb Meall a' Buachaille. Rachel's diary records that it was a hard climb and the total journey took us three hours and ten minutes mainly because 'I ran like a gazelle back down to the car'. Food also features significantly: 'While we were looking over the Cairngorms mum and dad showed me the ridges and corries and told me how they were formed by ice but I thought they looked like big ice cream scoops.'

One evening later that month we visited the Roche Moutonnee at Dulnain Bridge and ran over the exposed granite playing at being glaciers scouring the rocks. We also walked into Coire an t-Sneachda to get up close to those 'ice cream scoops'. My lasting memory of that day was Rachel asking if she could drink water from the burn and then declaring, 'wow, better than anything you get from a tap'. But this was meant to be a mountain day, not water: things were starting to get connected.

We talked about John Muir, his life and works, and most importantly we mentioned that he had found that when he looked at anyone thing in nature he kept finding that it was connected to everything else.

I wasn't at all sure how much of this the girls understood or whether they found it interesting. In late June, on our summer holiday, while descending Clisham on Harris I came upon the most massive piece of shed wool. I instantly fashioned a huge white beard and held it to my face and asked, 'who am I?' 'John Muir', they both replied and proceeded

to tell me in the ways of a four and seven year old why his ideas were important.

## Farmland and forest

We cycled from home along quiet roads and farm tracks into Abernethy Forest on a journey that has since become known as the 'three burns route' because it involves three such crossings. It is easy to be impressed by the majestic ancient pines older than granny, seedlings long before the first motor car was invented. When you're four and seven the best way to get to know an ancient pine tree is to climb it and that's exactly what they did.

We planted meadow seed in our back garden, two birch trees and put up a bird table. We made stone and wood piles to attract insects. To my amazement these were far more effective than I had ever thought possible and in the space of a month we tripled the number of bird species coming into the garden. On Lewis and North Uist we discovered that there is no better place than wandering through the flowering machair to experience the richness and diversity of meadow lands.

## The everythingness of it all

There were a couple of occasions last summer that provided real insights into a deeper understanding. On a car journey over the Lecht Rachel asked why couldn't more trees be allowed to grow by simply fencing the deer out of the uplands. So I talked about the jobs that stalking provides, the cost of fencing and the damage that fencing can do to Capercaillie. She thought for a while and declared, 'it is complicated isn't it'.

In an old text book not opened since my university days, I found a classic photograph of moorland leading into mountain interspersed with forest and farmland and a river. I showed the girls the photograph, read, 'for effective conservation the ideal pattern is a balanced mixture of different uses' and said, 'there is nowhere better in Britain to see that diversity than the Cairngorms'. The girls simply responded, 'so you have been telling us the truth!'

The John Muir Trust owns no land in the Cairngorms and yet by doing the Award I feel that my children are far better connected to the aims of the Trust than they would have been by visiting any Trust property. The Award enabled our children to discover their land in new ways that mean something to them. If we want to win hearts and minds and encourage a new generation of young people to love wild land then we should continue to promote and develop the John Muir Award.

● This year, 1550 people have completed a John Muir Award in the Cairngorms National Park.



*Pete Crane is Visitor Services Manager for the Cairngorms National Park.*



Samantha Pettigrew received the 50,000th John Muir Award. She worked for the Award with Backchat Youth Project from Helensburgh, in Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park.



Andrew McGovern, clearing fencing and cutting hedges with a team from Bridgend Volunteers, at Woodhall at the Inch nurseries in Edinburgh. 'Woodhall at the Inch' is part of Enable Scotland, which gives people with learning difficulties conservation skills such as tree planting and care, maintaining footpaths, litter sweeps and drystone dyking. It is based mainly in Craigmillar Castle Park.



Issie Inglis, at Lochan Uaine in the Cairngorms. Issie is Director of Glenmore Lodge, Wildwalks' main goal is to reach vulnerable, disabled people. It is an incredibly important part of the project, not just as an educational activity but also as the women see nothing but their feet and each other. It is important

**Behind the lens**

Photographer Keith Brame

'Snapshot' is intended to provide a photographic flavour of the work of the Award.

Ten years and 50,000 John Muir Award certificates – that seems like something to celebrate!

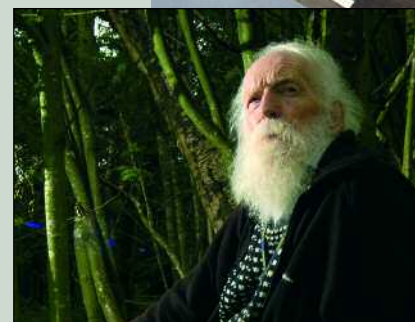
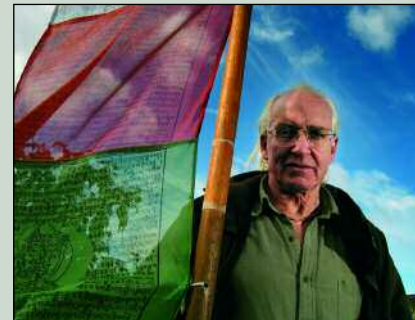
I have been photographing a few of the people behind the impressive sounding statistic – just a few of those who have been discovering, exploring, conserving and sharing their own wild places. They have taken a little time out from their activities to be photographed in their chosen environment.

Quoting from John Muir is a rewarding activity, but as I am a photographer I would like to pick a couple of quotes from an equally nourishing source, Henri Cartier-Bresson:

*In a portrait, I am looking for the silence in somebody.*

And another, which might ring true for readers of this magazine:

*There is no closed figure in nature. Every shape participates with another. No one thing is independent of another, and one thing rhymes with another, and light gives them shape.*



Doug Scott and Adam Watson, holders of the John Muir Trust Lifetime Achievement Award.



Becci Crook, Anna Czemrmys, Sarah Taghizadeh, part of of the Greenteam's work party at Oakbank and Almondell Country Park, West Lothian. Since 1995 over 1000 young people have worked with the Green Team.



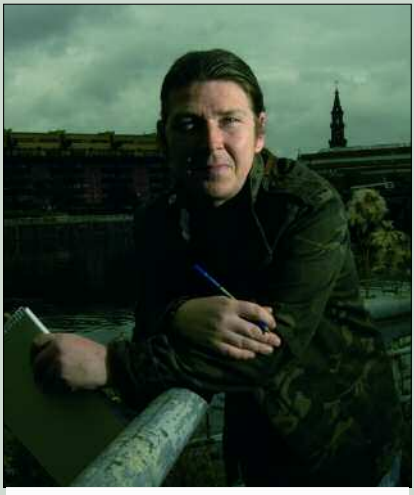
Rhyddian standing on top of his own education projects. He is participating in his own John Muir Conserver Award



SUMMER 2007 – A SNAPSHOT OF THE JOHN MUIR AWARD by KEITH BRAME



of Wildwalks which offers long term walking projects. Based at disadvantaged young women. 'We see the Award as an al tool, but part of social and cultural learning. At first many of tant to help them open their eyes.'



Jamie Shearer has been involved with the The Big Issue Foundation's Artworks project for four years, gaining seven Discovery Awards in the process. The project works with people who are either homeless, or at risk of being homeless. Participants have the opportunity to explore wild places such as Glencoe and the Cairngorms.



Del Davies in the former slate workings of Moel Siabod in North Wales. Del has been active with the John Muir Award since its early days, introducing it to outdoor centres where he worked. Above the slate mine, Evan Roberts, self-taught botanist, climber and conservationist, discovered rare mountain flora.



on yurt, which he hopes to use in low impact environmental development worker with Venture Scotland, and is basing his on Venture Scotland work in Glen Etive.

Team-mates from Venture Scotland's trip to Marthrown of Mable Education Centre near Dumfries prepare for the High Ropes course. The trip is part of a training session for volunteers. Venture Scotland has used the John Muir Award from its inception in 1995.



A team from Outward Bound Ullswater clear hemlock with the Forestry Commission in Whinlatter forest, Cumbria.





## John Muir Trust Corporate Members

The JMT was recently introduced to Pandaprint by our latest employee. Many of our staff enjoy the wildlands of Scotland and the rest of the UK. Camping, hiking and photography are some of the activities we all enjoy and take for granted. Pandaprint is proud to sponsor an organisation like the JMT, whose great work will help conserve our national treasures for generations to come.

*James Wilson, Managing Director, Pandaprint*

Corporate Membership is vital. It helps us protect wild places, increase fauna and flora, run our educational John Muir Award and our Activities and Conservation Programmes. Huge thanks to the members below for their valued support.

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Annie Addy

Clockwise from above: a walk over Clisham, winter day at Ardhasaig in Harris, yellow flag.

## North Harris Trust REGENERATION

URRAS CEANN A 'TUATH NA HEARADH, the North Harris Trust, has even more magnificent land than it started with. The 55,000 acres originally in its guardianship became 62,500 in the spring of 2006, when the Loch Seaforth Estate, with the townships of Scaladale, Maraig and Reinigeadal, was reunited with the rest of North Harris.

Despite the immense effort, mostly voluntary, that went into the community buyouts and has continued every day since then, the NHT is only at the beginning of a long road. The community has possession of the land; but now the task is 'to regain control of the land in a sustainable way', the NHT chair Calum Mackay says. Sustainable, that is, in terms of population and economy, and a secure future for the 700 people who live there, as well as for the natural heritage.

The Trust took possession of the 'stone and earth' of the North Harris Estate in March 2003. Calum speaks of 'the powerful attraction of the land itself', and open, responsible access for residents and visitors, and active encouragement of people to go out on the land has been part of the NHT philosophy from the beginning. It runs the annual Tiorga Mor hill race over a five mile course above Amhuinnsuidhe Castle and has also organised walks, though with less take-up. It takes information and awareness-raising seriously, and publishes information leaflets and a wonderfully detailed relief map by cartographer Wendy Price, which you can buy and frame (*inside back cover*). Visitor numbers on the hills have grown, especially those in groups. Calum puts this down at least in part to community ownership, believing that visitors feel more welcome when they know the land belongs to the people.

A successful hind stalking club helps 'the sustainable management of the herd in a sportsmanlike manner' and offers local enthusiasts stalking opportunities they would never otherwise have imagined.

The JMT was invited to join the board for the new Trust as a conservation partner, ready to provide advice and support on environmental management. 'It was a great privilege', JMT director Nigel Hawkins said at the time, 'for us to be invited to join forces with a community which has shown tremendous resolve and determination to take responsibility for their land.'

Duncan MacPherson, NHT's first land manager, started in late 2006 and has a full programme of work on the ground – joined by JMT's partnerships manager Mick Blunt for a monitoring programme (page 20), and by volunteer work parties for tasks from planting trees in remote Glen Langadale, one of the five sites earmarked for forestry, to path repairs and beach cleans. The estate's network of paths – a mix of stalkers' paths and old through routes from before the motor age – is an important part of the heritage in its own right. Most are



## ROAD

in good shape and they all help to make the remoter parts of North Harris surprisingly accessible.

If the tracks are basically OK, the economy basically isn't. 'The former pattern of crofting was sustainable', Calum says, '-we know that from the many years it lasted. But the way that crofting was, has gone.' There are fewer active people on the crofts, and their age profile isn't encouraging.

The new farming support regime, no longer based on subsidised production, is bringing in 20 years of change. The idea of stewardship is accepted, but it sits uneasily with some of the market-led approaches that government is pushing at the same time. The Trust 'needs to find a new way to keep people here and make life on the croft worthwhile.' Something that produces year round income. Visitors are far from doing this. Though the season has got longer, no business is seriously busy for more than half the year. But the wind blows all the year, and the NHT wants to develop a three-turbine installation at Monan, above the old whaling station and near the road from Tarbert to Stornoway. It was, they decided, the only investment that would yield year-round jobs and the income stream that the NHT needs.

You can't overstate what this seemingly modest scheme means for the NHT. They are confident its income would give them financial independence and the ability to spread seed money into, for example, housing and apprenticeship schemes.

That might stem the population decline; but they have mapped out a range of much more pioneering outcomes. One would see Harris becoming 'a leading example of local energy production and energy saving' – better than

self-sufficient in energy, highly efficient and innovative. In another outcome, North Harris would channel investment into its heritage: the landscapes, paths, conservation sites, archaeology. By researching, restoring, explaining and generally promoting its assets they would become 'a symbol of the regeneration of Harris.'

Ambitious? They probably need to be, because the depopulation clock is ticking, as seen in primary school rolls. Time presses. In the summer the NHT was disappointed to learn that its turbine development had been called in for a (probably lengthy) planning inquiry; but as we went to press there was relief: the inquiry threat was lifted.

The John Muir Trust has supported the scheme as a community-scale project with a tolerable effect on the views. It continues to support it now.

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*Caraidean* ('friends') is produced twice a year for the Friends of North Harris, which was set up to link people who live there and those with an interest in the area.



**The JMT works with community based trusts in Harris and Lewis. In these pages, we look at North Harris Trust and Galson Estate Trust, and ask some of the people living there to write on their work, their concerns, and their delight at being there.**



Anke Addy



## Stuck in the Muck with Mick Blunt



Duncan MacPherson on monitoring work; the rock prow of Sron Ulladal.

FRONT CRAWL OR BACKSTROKE? The question flashed into my mind as I sank rapidly into the peaty gloop that I had foolishly mistaken for firm, but damp, ground. As the cold black water slid up the inside of my waterproof trousers and knocked alarmingly on the door of my nether regions, I rapidly racked my memory for what the grizzled author of my pocket SAS Survival Guide would do. I knew backstroke was the style of choice if you parachute into quicksand, but would he opt for an athletic and determined spot of front crawl to get out of a peaty swamp?

Being in the JMT, and not the SAS, I opted for the time honoured technique of yelling in alarm, followed by graceless and unco-ordinated flailing of my arms, which seemed to do the trick.

Duncan MacPherson, Land Manager with the North Harris Trust – and a long standing JMT member too – looked admiringly at the appalling stinky filth that now encased my trousers, before kindly pointing out a somewhat drier route that would take us out of the boggy glen of Abhainn Mhòr Ceann Reasort, and up to point WH18, one of 37 small sample points that we need to visit. As a reward for my attempted bog snorkelling, this turns out to border a beautiful lochan perched on the lower slopes of Stulabhal's north west ridge, right in the heart of the North Harris hills.

For the past two weeks I have been working with Duncan, local crofter Murdo MacKay and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) Area Officer Roddy MacMinn to assess the health of the wet heath in the North Harris Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Wet heath, heathery moorland with added bog, is one of eight habitats in North Harris which are protected under European Natura legislation, and until recently it hasn't been doing too well.

Like many places in the Highlands and Islands, grazing by large numbers of sheep and red deer has been taking its toll. However, sheep numbers here have declined dramatically in the last few years as a result of CAP changes. A recent count also showed fewer red deer on the estate. The four of us are trying to discover if this reduction in grazing animals is benefiting the SAC's habitats.

It's interesting, and sometimes challenging work. The points are randomly selected; some are easy to get to, others involve a walk of several hours across remote and boggy mountain terrain. Having random points is important, as it ensures we have a representative snap shot of the wet heath throughout the SAC – not just in the areas that are easily accessible. After all, if they are easy for us to reach, they are also easy for the sheep and deer.

Surveying in late summer brings its own hazards on warm, muggy, overcast days. Our surveying technique, which involves crouching down and closely inspecting the heather and other plants within each sample plot, has to be cunningly modified on days like this, in order to stay one step ahead of the monster Hebridean midges. We've become quite adept at surveying vegetation whilst walking constantly around the pole, which we use to mark the centre of each 4m square study point. The only way to study the heather on days like this is to grab handfuls in mid-stride and check each leading shoot, all the while marching dementedly back and forth like someone who has just downed twenty espressos.

Involving communities in detailed monitoring of their land is a new approach, and has only been possible because of close co-operation between the John Muir Trust, the North Harris Trust and SNH. Instead of the occasional visit by outside experts to assess whether or not important habitats are in 'favourable condition' (as the conservation jargon puts it), here in North Harris the local community is now learning to check the condition of their habitats for themselves.

Over the next five years we will be carrying out repeat studies of the wet heath, and also extending the project to include alpine grasslands – important areas of low growing herbs and grasses found on the summit ridges. The information we gather will give us unprecedented understanding of the effects of grazing on the SAC, and help the North Harris Trust to fulfil one of their key objectives – 'to keep North Harris wild and beautiful'.

● *Mick Blunt is a partnerships manager for the John Muir Trust. He lives on Lewis.*



Eric Meadows

## A Big Day with Duncan MacPherson

'WELL, THAT'S THE END of my Munro-bagging then' I thought on taking up employment in Harris seven years ago. I am glad to say that it wasn't, and that I have discovered a huge range of walking opportunities in one of our biggest areas of wild land. A number of fantastic ridge walks match many better known areas and produce stunning vistas taking in Lewis, the Uists, St Kilda, Skye and the northwest mainland. As an added bonus, apart from an outing on An Cliseam (2622ft, 799m) you are not likely to meet another soul all day.

Getting to summits and striding along ridges is my forte. However a quite different experience is one of my strongest memories. The Saturday morning in June was damp and instead of heading to the hill early my wife and I hung around to see what the weather would do. As the cloud cleared we made a snap decision to do something different and head for Kinloch Resort, an abandoned settlement at the very edge of North Harris Trust land and about as remote as it gets, eight miles from the public road. Within minutes we were on the path from Bogha Glas on Loch Seaforth, heading west into the hills. At one time many people would have walked this route to travel to the Uig area of Lewis as part of daily life, and the path they have left us is a great inheritance.

The track rises steadily to a height of 650ft at Bealach na h-Uamha. As we approached the bealach a lumbering giant of a bird looking far too big for the landscape flew into view. The flash of white confirmed him to be a sea eagle. Marvelling at the sight we descended into Glen Langadale and then climbed a series of switchbacks to a bealach just over 1000ft. The track continues west but we headed due north to the nearby summit of An Rapaire across the boundary into Lewis. From here a panorama unfolded, including the 7-mile length of Loch Langabhat stretching up





## Rhodri Evans' track record

through Lewis, the overhanging cliff of Sron Ulladal and the hills of Uig.

Our destination of Kinloch Resort was low, but we had that familiar summit experience of finding that others had got there before us. Three crofters from Uig had come the same way as ourselves in order to experience this place of which they had only heard until now. Neither they nor we were disappointed. A scatter of ruins and a couple of watchers' cottages lay either side of the two salmon rivers that met at the head of the bay. A solitary tree grew in a stackyard; the moor rose gently to the south and west until the hills thrust out of it to dominate the scene. Most impressive of all the rock prow of Sron Ulladal looked as if it would sail into port alongside us in a few minutes. Apart from ourselves the place was very still. What would have been going on here 150 years ago? What did the residents think when a sea eagle flew overhead?

Day trippers cannot stay long here so we set off on our return. Taking a slightly different route we followed the Abhainn Mhor Ceann Resort, and then the Abhainn a' Chlair Bhig along the Lewis-Harris boundary. We stepped further back in time as we came across two beehive dwellings, one of them almost perfectly intact. We stopped to contemplate what it was like living here in the original template for sustainable housing. Onwards we climbed, more slowly now as our legs tired and almost stepping on a young deer calf asleep in the heather. It awoke with a fright on hearing my voice, leapt to its feet and soon ran 100 yards as we spotted its mother looking down with concern from above. We stopped briefly at Loch Chleistir on our way to the bealach between An Rapaire and Stulabhail once more. The summit of Stulabhail (1900ft, 579m) offers some of the best views in Harris but there was no question of climbing it today. Instead we headed back down the zigzag track, enjoying the evening sun on Mullach an Langa and Teilesbhal. A final climb back out of the glen and the gentle descent back to the shores of Loch Seaforth left us weary but content, as any good hill day should.

The following day as we were enjoying the quiet of the Harris Sabbath we were alerted to a fracas out in the bay. No more than 200 yards from our house the sea eagle was attacking a group of geese in the water. Slow, rhythmic wing beats kept him aloft while he looked for an opportunity to pounce. The honking of the adult geese was not enough to distract him as he dipped into the water and lifted a gosling clear in his talons. As he turned to leave victorious one of the geese rapidly drew its head back and fired it like a harpoon into the sea eagle's underbelly. Stunned by the counter-attack he dropped the gosling back into the water and retreated bruised and empty handed.

Sometimes the wild heads straight to you.

- *Duncan MacPherson is land manager for the North Harris Trust.*

IF I HAD TO SUM UP the Outer Hebrides in one word it would be 'wild'. The weather certainly qualifies, and the landscape is partly mountainous with vast tracts of moorland and many miles of unspoilt beaches.

But this is not an empty wilderness! People live and work here as they have done for centuries and there are vibrant communities with strong cultural beliefs, musical and literary traditions. There has always been an unwritten understanding of open access among crofters and landowners here, so the implementation of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act, which has made such a difference to access in other areas, really only meant 'business as usual' for most of the Isles. This also means that conflict between land managers and users of access is infrequent, though there will always be one or two who resent people stravaiging on their land. At that point it's my job to intervene and try to find a compromise, which usually works – in the end.

Though we don't suffer the same pressures as the most popular upland areas, nevertheless tracks do get eroded and can rapidly turn into quagmires. A 'stitch in time' can frequently save nine, so work is currently being undertaken to improve a number of access routes throughout the outer Hebrides.

The Western Isles Countryside Access Programme (WICAP) was established in 2004 to upgrade about 200 km of paths throughout the Isles. It's led by Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar and jointly funded by Scottish Natural Heritage, Western Isles Enterprise and the council, and with European funding via the Highlands and Islands Special Transitional Programme.

The paths being upgraded range from mountain routes to shorter ways around settlements and through the flat machair land. The work will improve path quality and enhance the enjoyment of residents and visitors alike. Many of these routes will undoubtedly become Core Paths in due course and add to the variety of routes available.

*To illustrate the kinds of projects that we have been working on I asked Susan Rabe, WICAP Project Officer, to pick a couple of examples.*

■ The first is a walk that has been developed over an area of rough grazing and forestry to the North West of Loch Ulapuil in Lewis. The project has opened up the moorland to enable people of all abilities to enjoy a tranquil area with stunning views of the hills and lochs of Harris to the South. The walk, just off the A859 road, meanders through a woodland plantation and spurs off the main walkway lead to viewpoints, one overlooking a stand of pines where herons roost.

Wildlife watchers are in for a treat as the woodland/moorland habitat attracts species like the wren, skylark and golden plover. If you can sit

quietly for a while you may spot an otter fishing in Allt Loch na Criadh or catch a glimpse of a peregrine falcon hunting in the skies above Meannan Mor.

■ The second example is much wilder in character. The tiny village of Reinigeadal in North Harris was only accessible by sea or on foot by a rough upland path until the late 1980s when an asphalt road connected it to the rest of Harris.

The historic path between Reinigeadal and Urgan, East of Tarbert, is now one of Harris' most popular routes for mountain bikers and walkers, many of whom stay at the Gatliff Trust Hostel at Reinigeadal. The track often features in the annual Hebridean Challenge endurance race.



Evening boat to Tarbert from the Reinigeadal track above Urgan.

A beautifully hand-crafted path over challenging moorland and coastal terrain, it was probably built over a number of years during the 19th century. It crawls through the mountain beauty of North Harris, rising from the Tarbert-Scalpay road, over the bealach between Trollamul and Beinn Tarsuinn at 280 m above sea level, then plunging 170 m down the Sgriob (meaning to scrape, drag) into the bay of Loch Trollamarraig. Often the only company here is that of the 'blue men' of the Minch – the seals that shelter in the bay.

In 2006 the footpath was surveyed in detail and damaged areas requiring urgent attention were identified. Traditional stone construction techniques are being used in repairs. Collapsed culverts, cross drains, water bars, revetments and stone pitching features are being rebuilt, while hand drainage and light touch landscaping will ensure minimal impact to the sensitive site and environs.

If you are looking to walk all day and often see no one else (even in the height of summer!) and if you have an interest in upland and moorland flora and fauna then visit this largely unspoilt area.

- *Rhodri Evans is Countryside Access manager for Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles Council).*



# THE LINK WITH THE LAND

Anne Campbell

## Galson Estate Trust

Latha Mòr Ghabhsainn, Galson's Great Day, came on 12 January this year, when the Galson Estate Trust achieved community ownership of the estate's 55,000 acres, the greater part of North Lewis. We spoke to Agnes Rennie, vice-chair of the trust, and to countryside ranger Julie Sievewright.

THINK OF NORTH LEWIS and you may imagine miles and miles of low, drab moorland. The area in fact has plenty of scenic diversity, and on a sunny day vivid colours too: its dynamic Atlantic coastline has dark cliffs, rocky shores, shingle and gleaming sands; along the road, the white houses of its 22 townships stand out from the green of the machair and grassland; the rolling miles of peatlands are certainly vast, but they are not trackless and are rich in human and natural heritage.

Agnes Rennie believes the rural economy, and therefore the landscape, are at a crossroads because of changes in the support systems for crofting, market forces and the effect this has on stock rearing. 'The challenge' she says, 'is to maintain the link with the land and do something worthwhile with the crofts. People are grappling with how to manage the land so it isn't abandoned on the pretext of becoming a wilderness – something very different from a landscape managed for its biodiversity'. The trust has a vision of what the future landscape might be; one that Agnes summed up as: 'The land looking managed and cared for; stock around – and also corncrakes and peewits and skylarks and bonxies and eagles'. The best chance of a good outcome is if everyone works together and the Trust is beginning to build good relations with the township grazings committees.

The buyout was prepared during a wave of renewable energy schemes in the highlands and islands, and the new trust inherited the lease granted by the previous owner to Lewis Windpower Ltd for part of Europe's largest wind farm, 181 giant turbines with a blade-top height of 140 m.

The coincidence of this windpower project, Agnes says, gave people the wrong impression of the whole venture. The buyout did not hang on revenues from the developers; it was simply 'the right thing to do at the time'. Agnes puts her own concerns about the Lewis Windpower scheme down as 'the numbers, the scale, questionable economic and environmental returns... and the tearing up of the moor'. Galson Estate Trust plans its own community-scale farm of up to three turbines and believes it can



make a real contribution to the local economy.

Large windfarms are not planned only for Galson or for North Lewis: the latest application, at Pairc in the quiet south east of the island, opens the cumulative prospect of a 40-mile chain of turbines, visible from all over Lewis. Three major windfarms are being opposed by the John Muir Trust, but the JMT is actively supporting smaller community schemes, such as those being put forward in Galson and North Harris.

For all its acres Galson Estate Trust has just one employee: not a land manager, or a factor, or a surveyor, but a countryside ranger. 'It's no accident that we took on a ranger first', says Agnes. 'We did it to help us engage, and build relationships. Twenty years ago, relationships between crofters and conservation bodies were terrible; no-one would have dreamed a ranger would be a first hire for a community trust!'

Relationships – bridge-building – promoting a part of the Western Isles that has been 'left out a bit' – these are the core of what ranger Julie Sievewright does. She's based at Habost in Ness, a few miles from Butt of Lewis, and just along the road from Comunn Eachdraidh Nis (Ness Historical Society). The only countryside ranger in the Western Isles, she promotes the natural heritage of the area at all sorts of local venues and events, from a school biodiversity week to guided walks, a carnival and an historical exhibition. With a background working with visitors to Scotland, she also has her eyes on the coachloads from cruise ships putting in at Stornoway. Visitors who make it to North Lewis often just go to the lighthouse at Butt of Lewis and head back. Julie would like them to see, and understand, more of its riches, and is working with the Western Isles Tour Guides Association to help that happen.

Galson Estate has its share of national designations for scenery and wildlife, and its own local nature reserve at Loch Stiapabhat in Ness, a trough of land that may have been used to take ships between the west and east coasts. Julie posts wildlife sightings and the progress of the seasons in an 'Urras Ranger' blog, and is bringing out a leaflet on the natural and cultural heritage with JMT partnerships manager Mick Blunt.

Galson's human heritage is all around you. Almost all of the moor is common grazings; it's a cultural as well as a physical landscape whose features are now being written down and digitised. There are 5000 years of history being investigated, and Julie keeps in touch with archaeological teams. Knowledge emerges about monoliths, Viking cemeteries revealed by the advancing sea, churches and cells, the buildings of the governors of Ness; it all enables people – as one historian put it – to feel 'at the centre of their own world, rather than at the very periphery of someone else's'.



*Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn, (Galson Estate Trust) Buth Lisa, Habost, Ness, Isle of Lewis HS2 OTG. 01851 810 825 office@uoglt.com.*

*Photos from top (background) shieling remains on the moor; Clach an Truiseil, the tallest standing stone in Scotland at almost 6m high; Julie Sievewright; the sands at Eoropie in Ness, just south of Butt of Lewis.*





'Miles of heather-clad landscape, intermixed with bog-down or cotton sedge, so that it looked as if it had ben sprayed with snowflakes.' Photo Anne Campbell.

## THE MOORLAND OF LEWIS *by Finlay MacLeod*

TWO FEATURES DEFINE the island; its continuous coastline, as it sits out in the ocean, and its moorland heart. For the many generations who have lived here, these complementary facets of Lewis have been essential both to their livelihood and to their understanding of themselves. Intertwined with 'Who are you?' is 'Where are you from?' So it is for someone like me whose family roots interlock solely within Lewis' coastal and moorland frame.

At one level of perception and language the moor has always been there, seeming a natural and latent place. As if it waits to express itself only in response to those who wish to link with it; its negative capability leaving it open to impression. So that awareness of what it is, and the nature of interaction with it, can change across the life of a people or an individual.

Given the traditional society of Lewis, the pervasive relationship has been a functional one; one that has been appreciative of what the moorland provides and which does so if it is understood and nurtured. From early times, people living in its coastal townships have utilised the moor on a seasonal basis and this necessitated having a rich and extensive mind-map with an intricate pattern of placenames criss-crossing its many locations. Indeed, its seeming quiet formlessness required an ascribed pinpointing of names to make it known.

Along with placenames and accumulated experience came the network of story, which gave to the moorland yet another layer of societal memory and meaning. Small cairns often mark distant events; the past held in the present by naming and by story. As this grew, so did the awareness of the moorland as an abstract concept. People traversed the known and named moor constantly; this often related to the tending of animals, be this to do with small, crofting bands of sheep that always 'took' to that part of the moor that was their first grazing as young lambs, or with taking the cattle to summer shielings deep into the high moors of the island,

along the heathery shoulders of streams and lochs.

The moor offered another intimate and densely named interaction within the seasonal and carefully tended work of securing the year's supply of household peats. Each family being allocated its own set of peatbanks, the knowledge of generations went into the art of procuring fuel in this way, with the young acquiring the set of necessary skills and the extensive vocabulary that went with it. Physically and emotionally one was reared to become embedded in the very substance of the moor.

Gaelic songs deal with the most telling of the emotional markers of island life and sudden dislocation in love or migration often comprise the central theme. In their idealistic dream of 'home', the very core of their identity, Lewis songs of longing invariably serenade the mythic emblem of childhood yearnings – the surrounding seas and the ochre and russet moors. The songsters define Lewis in terms of these, and these alone.

One tincture of the moorland 'neglected peat-hags' is seen, as with the great Hugh MacDiarmid: 'sphagnum moss in pastel shades/of yellow, green and pink; sundew and butterwort/waiting with wide-open sticky leaves for their tiny winged prey.' 'Nothing but heather!' is how some apostrophise the 'multiform' moors. And to raise one's eyes is to behold the blues of haze across the distant stretches, often fading into gentle foothills. 'I could see in all directions,' wrote the Lewis writer Norman Morrison, 'miles of heather-clad landscape, intermixed with bog-down or cotton sedge (the canach of the Gaelic bards), so that it looked as if it had been sprayed with snowflakes.'

If societal changes mean that the young do not relate to the moorland as in the past, so that their feeling for it is not enriched and matured in first-hand experience, it becomes an issue of heuristics as to how they may develop their concepts of appreciation and conservation. Where their crofting forebears had their functional approach to conservation, it has now become a question of how

young people are to be socialised so as to attain a more 'distant' or abstract feeling for conservation. The question of prime importance is how to aid and educate the young to an awareness of the significance of diversity, fragility and conservation.

While such cognizance of the importance of the natural environment remains unheralded those who see 'nothing but heather' will continue to see the moorland merely as a fallow and forlorn zone into which large-scale industrial development, in the form of massive wind farms, fits ideally. 'I drove to this meeting through miles and miles of nothing,' reported one local councillor at a public meeting in Lewis. Where diversity is spurned, in nature or in language or in culture, there is epitomised a dismal failure of imaginative education. In the hiatus between a functional and a metaphoric relationship with landscape, a terrible blankness resides.

While landscape such as the Lewis moorland lies under threat it is noteworthy that few and only the weakest of comments have been made, concerning this, by educators or by writers or artists. How has it become so difficult to defend such an environment or speak effectively of its importance?

Even at its most docile, the Lewis moor can instil threat and fear. At times it wraps itself in dense and beguiling mist, giving rise to panic and confusion in those lost in it. Poets write of its attraction but also of its ultimate threat as with the Lewis poet Derick Thomson, writing: 'The heaving, billowy, fruitful bog/lying there till eternity/with its mouth open/swallowing sheep/ and men/ and me.' On to the dreaded Satan-like 'moor stalker' of past days, Mac an t-Srònaich, whose supposed dastardly attacks petrified women and children at their shielings: yet he exclaimed 'Seven years have you succoured me, brindled moorland of Lewis!' And me; tenfold.

● *Finlay MacLeod, a Lewisman, is a JMT member and is a member of the Lewis anti-windfarm group Moorland Without Turbines.*





## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

A placename walk through the mountains of Harris and northwards to Lewis

### Jean Mills



Looking up Glen Miabhaig to Òireabhal (L, 662 m) in falling hail or snow, and Sròn Scourst (491 m). Eric Meadows May 1955.

THE NAMES IN LEWIS AND HARRIS (without going into historical detail) may be Norse, Gaelic, English, anglicised Gaelic, gaelicised Norse, anglicised gaelicised Norse or even anglicised gaelicised scandinavianised Gaelic! But let's not be put off.

Starting from Miabhaig (narrow bay) there's a strong track through the glen. In the hills to the west is a lochan called Loch a' Mhuillin. Possibly it supplied water for a mill via Abhainn a' Mhuillin (river of the mill). There's an ancient connection with many rivers called Afon or Avon: Gaelic bh sounds like English v.

We go between Cleisabhal (cliff fell) and Uisgneabhal Beag and Mor. Uisge is Gaelic for water or rain, beag is small and mor is big. I don't think this hill is any wetter than others but possibly it supplied water for a settlement below via Lag Garbh (rough hollow). Bhal is from Norse fjall and sometimes appears as val.

Smearasmal appears as a sròn (nose) and glac (hollow or defile). Smear is from Norse smyör meaning butter. It could refer to a shieling for the dairy cows as a Smirisary on the mainland or to a place where sheep were gathered for smearing (before sheep dips they had butter and tar rubbed into their skin – lovely job!) Tiorga, 3 miles away as the eagle flies is thought to be from tjorgadhr, a place sheep were tarred. It seems unlikely the work was done on these far heights but they could have been the dominant hills near the work sites. Tiorga Mòr is now the scene of an annual hill race. Perhaps it will get a new name?

Passing Loch Scourst we walk below Sròn Scourst. Sròn (nose) is always prominent bare rock with cliffs and sometimes overhangs, very attractive to climbers. Scourst is said to be from sgiort or possibly sgùird meaning skirt, or sgurd, a corner of land. Looking up I'm sure you will see skirt shapes. These craggy promontories mostly face north, ie towards Lewis. They make it easier to understand how one island became two in name. It is likely that Harris got its name from people looking from the north – na Hearadh – the heights. They must have looked nearly impassable.

Opposite is Òireabhal. This could be whin fell, gorse fell or maybe gravel fell, from Norse eyre. Take a look and see what fits. Nearer and lower is Cleit Cathadail. The recurring cleit tells of a rock face or rocky ridge. Dail is generally what it sounds like.

Now the valley opens out and we have gentler slopes and evidence of temporary habitation. There are shieling remains and higher, above the eas (waterfall) the name Lag an Taige-cloiche appears (hollow of the stone house). This was probably distinguished by being made entirely of stone, whereas most shieling huts, being only used in summer, were partly built with turf.

Coming down to Lochan an Fheòir (grassy loch) we are under Sròn Ard. Ard means high but often occurs as a promontory and the first part of a name, as in Aird a' Mhulaidh beside Loch

Shipoint. To the west is Gormul Mòr or Gormal Mòr. I would like to call this 'big blue hill' (gorm – blue, al – hard rock) but McIver gives 'clean swept'. This is a good example of a little knowledge being a dangerous thing in place names. It needs a great deal of research to be certain.

If you now want to stay among mountains you might turn eastwards between Loch Chleistear and Creag Chleister. If this is from Clystr meaning pony path, it indicates a very old route. It crosses two high passes and descends between them to Glen Langadale and the river feeding Loch Langabhat (long loch, vatn – Norse lake), two examples of doubles, or tautology if you like. Langadale doesn't need 'glen' and Langabhat doesn't need 'loch'. Bealach na h-Uamha is 'pass of the cave'. The cave is in the slope to the SE. The path ends at Bowglas after passing, on the south side of the glen, Druim nan Caoraich (ridge of the sheep) and Loch nan Learg (of the black-throated divers).

If you are continuing northwards from Loch an Fheòir you will pass Loch Bhoisimid. Its name means it has a current flowing through the middle. This becomes Abhainn Mhòr Ceann Reasort (Mhòr, not Mòr because Abhainn is feminine) which joins with Abhainn a'Chlair Bhig at Tota Choinnich (mossy walls or ruin). Tota used to refer to the turf walls of the shielings but has come to mean ruin. This river crosses Clàr Beag (little plain) and Chlar Bhig is the genitive form of this – so river of the little plain. Beyond this is Airidh na Lurga. Airidh is the Gaelic shieling and lurg is a gentler slope between hill and plain. Westwards Salla Ruidear describes these wet lands well. Salla means dirt or filth or mud; ruidear is a Gaelic name for herb robert, a pink flowered plant, but it could come from hrutr, a ram.

At Ceann Loch Reasort we have a common element of Scottish place names. Ceann, meaning head, often appears kin. Resort or resord seems to mean boundary or march fjord. Here was one of several settlements now deserted. Luachair, nearby, means rushes.

So from here you cross into Lewis and the Morsgail forest and a boggy tramp towards Loch Morsgail. Skali is a Norse name for shieling, so Morsgail was a moor shieling. Except for Mointeach (peat moss or moorland) and Salla behind us we don't seem to have any names describing this lower land, but then a lack of names can also tell us something and also, for instance, we have not passed any places with bost (farm or settlement) in the name. I think we have a fair picture of how the land we have traversed was used and why, according to its physical features and remains.

● Please don't use this as a route guide. I have not been precise about paths or the lack of them.

Jean Mills is a JMT member who lives on Scalpaigh.

For more names, she suggests you might try the following books:

*The Western Isles, their History, Traditions and Placenames*, W C MacKenzie, 1932.

*Placenames of Scarp*, John MacLennan, 2001.

*Placenames of Lewis and Harris*, D McIver, 1934.

*Scottish Placenames*, W F H Nicolaisen, 1976.

*Dwelly's dictionary*.

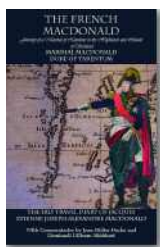
# The Marshal's Journal

Books



Tommy MacDonald

Duncan MacEachen, first cousin 5 times removed of Neil MacEachen, beside the ruin of Neil's house at Howbeg, South Uist.



## The French MacDonald Journey of a Marshal of Napoléon in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, trans. Jean-Didier Hache. Islands Book Trust, £10 + £2 P&P

This is a remarkable story. The French born son of a Hebridean exile returns to see the land of his forebears and meet up with his relatives. So, big deal! But the exile was Neil MacEachen, close companion of Charles Edward Stuart and the organiser of the bonnie boat taking the Prince and Flora MacDonald over the sea to Skye. And the son, Jacques Etienne Joseph Alexandre MacDonald was a senior politician, Arch-Chancellor of the Légion d'Honneur and retired Marshal of the French Army. A young officer in the royal army, he prospered during the paranoia and madness of the French Revolution, survived the jealousy and suspicion of Napoleon Bonaparte, and even the restoration of the monarchy, carefully sidestepping the desperate last throw that ended at Waterloo in 1815.

In 1825 MacDonald visited Britain, and this diary records the part of that journey through Scotland, where he was anxious to visit the MacDonald heartland, especially the Clanranald territory of Moidart and South Uist. 80 years previously his father had been a hunted fugitive. Now, Jacobites were back in fashion and Walter Scott, whom he met, had spawned the romantic tartanry with which we are still living. MacDonald was given lots of official support including the use of a Royal Navy ship, more commonly used to harass the illicit whisky trade. That's the same navy that raped and plundered their way through the islands in an orgy of destruction in their hunt for the Prince and his companions.

On South Uist MacDonald visited Howbeg (Tobha Beag) where his father was

born then sailed round to Gleann Coradail on the east coast where Neil and the Prince had skulked in the cave, Uamh a Phrionnsa. The islanders turned up in great numbers, including some of his cousins. The Marshall spoke only French and a little English so all communication had to be translated from and to Gaelic. He also visited the main MacDonald strongholds in Sleat and Antrim before returning to the south coast and home. The diary was not intended for publication; his bad handwriting was transcribed by his daughter so there are a number of unclear passages. This modern translation is by Jean-Didier Hache, a Parisian with a long association with Scotland and its Western Isles who also provides a history and background of the Jacobites in France. Information on the Scottish scene is provided by Domhnall Uilleam Stiubhart.

Then as now South Uist was caught up in momentous change. The clan chiefs needed the local people to collect and prepare kelp and had supported legislation which effectively prevented them from emigrating. Kelp prices were tumbling and with them the whole West Highland economy and the disastrous Clanranald dynasty. The islanders would before long be left at the mercy of the rapacious Colonel Gordon of Cluny and the clearances would begin in earnest. Thankfully, the recent buyout under the Land Reform legislation leaves the future of the area much more in the hands of the local community.

I would recommend this book to anyone interested in this fascinating period in Scottish history, as the clan system disintegrated, Edinburgh New Town neared completion, a prosperous middle class emerged and early political organisation among workers was harshly suppressed. The

Reviewed by  
John Donohoe

Islands Book Trust is dedicated to producing material in and about the Scottish islands and this volume is an important addition to their list.

Oh, and you will be glad to know that Marshall MacDonald got a warm welcome at Kinfauns, where the castle was just being built.

- *John Donohoe is a Trustee of the John Muir Trust. He writes in a personal capacity.*

## Monadh Ruadh odyssey

A Cairngorm Chronicle by A F Whyte.  
Millrace Books, £14.95. ISBN 978 1 902173 238.



Before dawn on a June day in 1904, three young men set off from the Shelter Stone, where they had rested and enjoyed a Woodbine after descending from Cairn Gorm the night before. An account of their 38-mile tramp ending that evening at Dell of Rothiemurchus is the centre of this book, written in the 1940s and discovered many



years later by the author's daughter.

Fred Whyte was Liberal MP for Perth at age 26, and that was only the start of a distinguished public career. So it was some relief to find that his book is light on challenges and statistics, and full of enquiries and observations – about Gaelic place names, inter-visibility, the source of rivers, how to make a herring bap and the benefits of soaping your socks. Just for the record, though, their route included nine Munros and 9300 feet of ascent.

A touching epitaph finds him, in his 60s, stranded in Glen Einich with a gammy knee and musing on the golden eagle 'sent as a painful reminder of the littleness of man'.

What is it with the Cairngorms? They produce literature where other ranges yield writing. The same might be said of Millrace Books, with this well-made and present-sized offering. Only 500 have been printed: *caveat lector*.

MM

## Dumfries & Galloway

**25 walks: Dumfries and Galloway** by Tom Whitty. Mercat Press, list £9.99 online £7.49. ISBN 1841831182

Flying back from Shannon the clouds parted briefly. Where on earth are we? I don't recognise this coastline. Ah, that little harbour, it's Portpatrick, of course, on the Rhinns of Galloway. I'm sure I'm not alone in neglecting the south west of Scotland in my stravaiging. It's inexcusable, as this region has everything, except the dubious benefit of Munros.

This little book might persuade you to visit. It is an update by Mercat Press of the original 1995 HMSO guide, part of a series covering walking areas throughout Britain edited by Roger Smith. This particular volume is written by Tom Whitty, a countryside ranger with extensive knowledge of the local path network and the spine of the Southern Upland Way. This long distance path features significantly, forming part of attractive circular walks. The walks take in caves, castles brochs, and some world famous outdoor sculpture. Most of the walks are less than 10 km in length, and some are very suitable for a stroll for a couple of hours. The longest, 25 km around Moffat can easily be shortened if the weather deteriorates.

The layout is clear and concise, and each walk is shown on an OS map base. It takes a while to realise that the maps are at different scales, being adjusted to get the walk to fit in one page, but it is clear that the gridlines are a kilometre apart. If you are mainly intent on bagging, there are other more suitable guidebooks. If you are interested in seeing a variety of attractive places and learning something of the people and their rich history then this guide is ideal. And you can collect waymarks!

JD

### Next Journal February 2008

Please contact the editor by the end of November with your ideas for longer articles.



Mohammed Achari welcomes Charles Knowles (L) and Hamish Brown to the Bou Guemez.

# Atlas traverse

**The Mountains Look on Marrakech** by Hamish Brown. Whittles Publishing, £25.00. ISBN 978 1870325 29 5.

● *shortlisted for the Boardman Tasker Prize 2007*

Morocco has been Hamish Brown's second home now for 40 years and there are few Europeans with such an extensive knowledge of the Atlas Mountains. *The Mountains Look on Marrakech* describes a 96-day, 900-mile traverse of the Atlas in 1996 by Hamish and Charles Knowles with Berber muleteers Ali and Hosain (plus their mules Taza and Tamri).

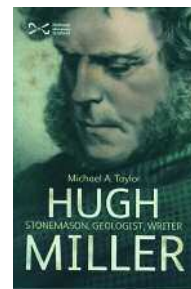
The short appendix on the history of Atlas exploration and the length of the bibliography hint at the lifetime of research behind this book – but this is no stuffy tome. The book is a delight. Much more than a mere travelogue, the journey is the thread along which the narrative is woven. Hamish's affection for the Berber people and their country is apparent and he shares with the reader anecdotes and knowledge accumulated over the years. We see the importance of planning and the advantage of Hamish's experience of the country. Even so he makes it clear that the journey would not have succeeded without Ali Elouad – a remarkable hillman. Ali was always on hand when they encountered difficulties and it's sad that the Moroccan bureaucrats will not recognise him as a guide because he lacks formal schooling.

My only minor criticism of the book is in the quality of the photographic reproductions. Every photograph appears to be taken in twilight! But as this is not a picture book it doesn't detract from the overall enjoyment – publishers please note however for future editions.

It is almost 30 years since *Hamish's Mountain Walk* described the first non-stop climb of all the Munros. Many of us use that book for ideas as we explore the Scottish hills. *The Mountains Look on Marrakech* provides a similar role for the Atlas. It's an essential aid for planning expeditions, supplies background information for anyone joining an organised trek, and is a good read for armchair travellers.

Peter Willimott

## An overfull life: Hugh Miller



**Hugh Miller: Stonemason, Geologist, Writer** by Michael A Taylor. National Museums of Scotland, 176 pp, £12.99. ISBN 978 1 905267 05 7.

The Victorian geologist Hugh Miller, born on the Black Isle, had a far-reaching impact in science; not only from his ground-breaking discoveries of fossil fish, but also in his writings that brought fossils to life for generations of readers. His lifelong fascination with rocks and fossils stemmed from his early years as a stonemason on the Black Isle. His formal education was short, but his reputation as a fossil collector, and as a careful analyser of what he found, ensured that he had an international reputation in geology's early days. He concentrated mainly on the fossil fish from the Old Red Sandstone and younger rocks in the north of Scotland, but he also travelled further afield, for example to the island of Eigg, where he discovered Plesiosaur remains and speculated on the nature of the lava flow that forms the famous Sgurr.

From a modern perspective, Hugh Miller's life seems overfull! His geological studies were mainly a spare time pursuit, as he was also deeply involved in the Free Church and editor for many years of *The Witness*, one of Edinburgh's most popular newspapers. Combining his interest in geology with his skills in writing gives us Hugh Miller's greatest legacy – a huge output of articles and books that popularised geology and educated the people of Scotland. His wife Lydia continued publishing after his death, with books such as *Testimony of the Rocks* and *The Old Red Sandstone* remaining in publication for decades.

Miller's reputation has been tainted by his suicide in 1856, at the age of 54, and the common perception that he was driven to take his own life by his failure to reconcile his religious beliefs with the evidence of the rocks. In this new biography, Michael Taylor from the National Museums of Scotland takes a fresh look at Hugh Miller. This sympathetic portrayal draws on many sources including Miller's own writing to present a wide review of the many strands of his life, suggesting his suicide was due to mental illness exacerbated by overwork. It is well worth reading to understand the context of Miller's life, his impact on Scottish geology, and as an introduction to his writing.

### Angus Miller

*Angus Miller runs Geowalks, guided walks and courses exploring the geology and landscapes of Scotland. www.geowalks.co.uk.*

- *Michael Taylor wrote on the parallels between John Muir and Hugh Miller in JMT Journal 32, January 2002.*

# Malcolm Slesser

Recalled by Ken Crocket

Five years ago, one of my fellow JMT trustees was Malcolm Slesser. We already knew each other through mountaineering, and, as many a mountaineer does, we had also gravitated towards sailing. In Malcolm's boat Caol na Mara (Song of the Sea), we demonstrated to the Trust the ultimate in energy conservation and sailed to a meeting on Skye.

Energy summed up the man; it was either pouring out of him, as an elemental force, or his intellect was wrestling with it, as a global problem. His friends could be infuriated by him, but he would be quick to admit to being wrong. On the sea, as in the mountains, a mildly stressful situation can often show the real persona, as on the occasion where he decided to face up to the Mull car ferry. Now this is a large and fast beast, and I was unlucky to be at the helm as we sailed home for our anchorage just north of Oban. The ferry had stormed out of harbour and was on a course which would wipe us out. I pointed this out to the skipper, who told me to hold firm.

As everyone knows, the rules state one point of view, and reality another. I pointed out our suicide course a second time, just to make sure, and he confirmed his decision. Well, I replied, it's your boat. All this while, I was eyeing the life jackets and wondering at my chances in the water. We were in luck: the ferry blinked first and pulled away to starboard. Malcolm looked over and with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes said well done. Was he testing the rules of the sea, the ferry, or his crew?

In his energy researches, latterly often made with his partner Jane, he could be just as assertive and just as right. He has a fair claim to have recognised an 'energy footprint' ages ago, before the planet came under visible threat from human excesses. His small bothy on the west coast had a solar panel. No excess here however, it could run a light bulb or slowly pump water into a header tank. The John Muir Trust should have had him years earlier, as its energy consultant, if only he could have been pinned down, for he was an inveterate explorer, opening up the Staunings Alps in Greenland and climbing boldly elsewhere. As it was, we were lucky enough to have had him on board.

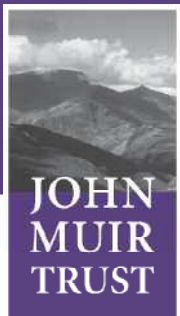


He was Scottish to a fault, and stood twice for Parliament as an SNP candidate. His hard work there, though not leading to his seat, paved the way for a later candidate. He regarded mountaineering as the last place where individuals could thrive through their own judgment, or fail through their own errors, and all without interference from a 'nanny state'. In solving the country's energy problems, he came to the same conclusion as I had, that alternative sources were insufficient and nuclear energy would be needed. This is what his research had shown, and this is what he had reluctantly accepted.

In life he was generous to his friends and great company, whether in a mountain hut or at sea. He revelled in wild land and worried over its future. I can only hope that some time in the future, if I'm in need, the old Viking's boat would stop, and pick me up. We'll toast him with a few lines from Kismul's Galley:

*'Here's red wine  
And feast for heroes  
And harping too  
And sweet sweet harping too'*

*Note:* Malcolm died on a western hill, having apparently suffered a heart attack. It was as he had wished it would be. He was in his 81st year, not that it showed!



## 'The Gift of Wildness'

*Gift Membership - the perfect Christmas or Birthday present for someone who loves wild places*

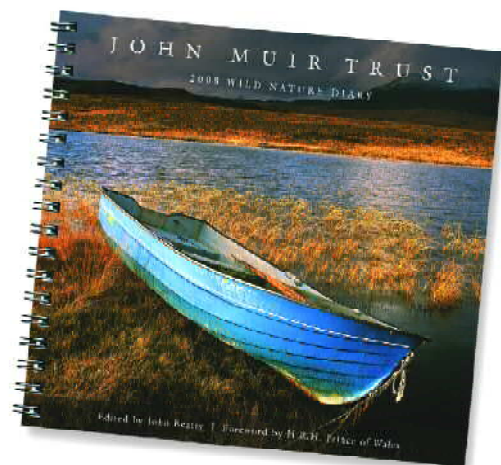
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# Events



## 13 Nov on Alpine Club, London

JMT supporter David Bellamy has an exhibition at the Alpine Club, London EC2, from 13 November. He's showing watercolours and oils of mountain scenery from Scotland to South America, plus the Alps, Himalayas, Arctic and other parts of the UK. To attend the preview from 5 pm on 13 November followed by a lecture by Kenton Cool at 7.30pm, ring 01982 560237 or email [jenny@davidbellamy.co.uk](mailto:jenny@davidbellamy.co.uk). The exhibition continues until Christmas, but is only open at certain times. For times, ring the Alpine Club on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday on 0207 613 0755. 55/56 Charlotte Road, London EC2A 3QF.

*Pictured: Bec rouge, watercolour.*

## Events

### Fri 26 Oct Meetings, Ullapool

JMT Chairman Dick Balharry will be visiting the Macphail Centre, Ullapool.

- Afternoon training/get together of local members interested in acting as occasional roving ambassadors at Sandwood and Quinag. 3pm–5pm.
- Reception and buffet supper for local members from the NW to meet the chairman. 6pm–7.30 pm. Members are invited to bring friends.
- 'Wild land for people and wildlife'. Illustrated talk and discussion with Dick. Combined meeting of JMT and Lochbroom Field Club. 7.30 pm–9 pm.

Information from Sue Hopkinson, 01854 612756, [hopkinson.rhue@virgin.net](mailto:hopkinson.rhue@virgin.net).

### 2007–08 Planting Carrifran Wildwood

Restoring native woodland to an entire upland catchment. Sundays 18 Nov, 20 Jan, 17 Feb, 16 Mar, 20 Apr and 18 May. Meet Carrifran car park (NT 159115), 10 am. A708 12 km from Moffat. Contact Peter Dregghorn, [pbdregghorn@btinternet.com](mailto:pbdregghorn@btinternet.com), information at <http://groups.google.co.uk/group/WWood>. There are also volunteering opportunities on most Tuesdays, and for treeline planting during high camping weekends on 16/17 Feb, 15/16 Mar, 19/20 Apr, 17/18 May, by arrangement

with Project Officer Hugh Chalmers, [Hugh@bordersforesttrust.org](mailto:Hugh@bordersforesttrust.org).

### Thu 29 Nov Talk, Glasgow

'Duncan Ban MacIntyre'. An account by author and raconteur Ian Mitchell of the life and times of the extraordinary 18th century bard. 7 pm Glasgow Caledonian University Room W119.

**Note** new group contacts: Mike Gray 01360 550962, Heather Willimott 01360 311304.

### 9–18 Nov Kendal Film & c Festival

JMT stall at the Kendal Mountain Festivals from 16–18 Nov.

[www.mountainfilm.co.uk](http://www.mountainfilm.co.uk).

### 23–24 Nov Dundee Film Festival

Dundee Mountain Film Festival, with JMT stall. [www.dundee-mountainfilm.org](http://www.dundee-mountainfilm.org).

### 30 Nov/2 Dec Paintings, Dunblane

Come Rich and Lovely Winter's Eve – paintings by Iona Leishman GSWA. A charity exhibition at Iona's home where buyers will once again be encouraged to support JMT. At 63 Argyle Way, Dunblane FK15 9DY (01786 824417). Dates and times are: Friday 30 November noon–8pm, Saturday 1 December 11am–8pm, Sunday 2 December 11am–8pm.

# Contacts

## Aberdeen area

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## Glasgow & West of Scotland

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Heather Willimott 01360 311304

## Strathspey

Alan Keegan, 01479 811047

## NW Highlands

Sue Hopkinson, 01854 612756

## Edinburgh & Lothians

Karren Smith, 07977 182137

## NE England

Eric Gendle, 01642 281235

## Yorkshire

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## Bristol

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## Hampshire

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## Newbury area

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## Oxford area

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## Norfolk and Suffolk

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## Cambridge

Richard Hindle, 01223 504264

## South Wales

John Taylor, 01568 614831

## North Wales

Rob Collister, 01492 582448

# JOHN MUIR TRAIL

'For a long time, I have wanted to walk this famous trail in the Sierra Nevada. Now I am starting to make plans to do it. I'd like to collect advice from those who have actually completed the trail. I'm especially interested in the best time to go, getting to & from the trail, food supplies, preventing bear trouble.'

If you can help, please contact David Kyles, at [David.Kyles@btinternet.com](mailto:David.Kyles@btinternet.com).



Looking down lower Coire Dhorraic of Ladhar Bheinn out to Loch Hourn and Beinn Sgritheall.

©JOHN.CLEARE/Mountain Camera Picture Library

## Happy days in Knoydart

The article by John Cleare (Knoydart & Loch Hourn, Journal 42) brings back some happy memories from June 1988.

In April that year my friend Rayond Reville and I did a magnificent trek in Nepal, to the Langtang valley, over the Laurabiner pass and down the Halambu valley to Kathmandu. A few weeks later we 'walked in' to Barrisdale from Kinloch Hourn and pitched our tent near the bothy there. The midges were bad and each night penetrated our tent in large numbers. So we decided to leave about 5 am to climb Ladhar Bheinn which was the main purpose of our little expedition.

Sadly there was cloud on the top so we saw none of the famous views. We wandered along the ridges for a couple of hours but we were well down from the top when the clouds dispersed by mid-morning. When we returned to our campsite there was another tent pitched, which was occupied by three affable gentlemen from West Yorkshire, who had arrived over by boat from Arnisdale. They were well stocked with midge repellents and the like, which they generously offered to us. They did little to repel the midges which were in clouds everywhere. So we had another early start the next morning, and walked the Luinne Bheinn tops.

The following morning, 29 June, we decided to pack up camp and leave early. Breakfast with the midges was impossible so we were on the lochside path back to Kinloch Hourn by about 5 am. We met up with a walker, and after a few minutes' conversation I recognised that it was John Cleare. He had been on the photographic venture that he described in his article. We walked back with him to his VW campervan at the road-end car park. He kindly supplied several large beakers of tea to assuage our thirst, for it was already a hot morning. He also autographed one of his pictures in my edition of Irvine Butterfield's 'High Mountains' (what a wonderful book this still is!).

We had our lunch that day on the summit of Sgurr a Mhaoraich, whilst the beer that evening was especially welcome and plentiful in the Tomdoun Hotel. My legs took several days to resume their normal colour after all the midge bites. In future we decided that Scottish holidays should be completed

by mid-June to avoid the midge (if that is possible). Happy days.

**Edward Bunting**  
Hartlepool

## Another way

David Thornley (Letters, Journal 42) should realise the problem with wind farm paraphernalia, pylons etc is not just a visual one (I find it odd a JMT member finds most of the highlands uninteresting). Whole ecosystems will go under concrete and be lost – flora, fauna, wildlife habitats.

Mr Thornley states fossil-fuelled power stations would not have to be kept on standby. How so? – the stored energy used on an industrial scale would not last long and meanwhile we would have to wait for boilers to get up steam to turn the turbines. He

## YOUR LETTERS

To the editor by end of 2007, please.

Contact details on page 1.

admits they are inefficient.

Anyway, why isn't the government forcing builders to erect eco-friendly homes with solar panels? The land is already out there, it's called rooftops, and would take some of the pressure off our landscapes. I would prefer the lights to go out and see our countryside. There has to be another way, and No, I will not be voting for windmills on an industrial scale.

Keep up the good work.  
**J K Baker**  
Watton at Stone, Herts

## Practical action on global warming

In the July JMT NEWS, Dick Balharry reminds us that global warming 'needs to be part of the future'. How are we to respond in practical ways in reducing global warming while taking account of the needs of local communities affected by proposals for renewable energy schemes? With an agreed policy to rule out industrial-style schemes because of their unacceptable impact on the scenery, in itself a valuable resource, then practical

solutions of electrical generation for local distribution must be simple, safe and in tune with the landscape.

Windmills can be an appropriate choice, but care is needed in their siting and detailed design. In Denmark the location of windmills is decided by the local planning authority. The Local Plan will determine siting, the numbers within each group, the height and colour of the masts, the means of access and landscaping. The local community and developers will then know the rules.

In much of the discussion of renewable energy there is barely a mention of hydro power which is an immense resource. Design of a hydro station needs the skills of the engineer, the architect and the ecologist working as a team. Small scale run of river projects should present few difficulties if they are carefully sited, sensitively designed and unobtrusive.

Part of the future will include the railways converting to electric traction, which is a different agenda. It need not present a new threat to the landscape, wild or otherwise, but it would be very significant in tackling global warming.

**Alan Wightman**  
Portree

## Wind power 'pathetically small'

In Journal 42 Richard Brownsword takes Andrew Nelson to task regarding his 'flawed thesis' on backup for intermittent wind energy. Dr Brownsword, who actually works for the wind industry, should be aware of the European Wind Integration Study Towards a Successful Integration of Wind Power into European Electricity Grids (January 2007), in which it states 'the variable contributions from wind power must be balanced almost completely with other backup generating capacity located elsewhere'. Any backup in the UK has to be sourced from our power stations as we cannot import any useful amount of wind power from Europe, given that the cross-channel capacity is only 2 GW and this is almost in full use anyway. Wind energy was supposed to replace that from conventional power stations, yet we are building more power stations, while wind power remains pathetically small (just 1% in 2006 according to BERR, the old DTI).

Some windfarms, like Scroby Sands offshore windfarm are dogged by gearbox and undersea cable faults, providing a graphic illustration of how the wind industry is all about appearances and little to do with producing energy.

The British Wind Energy Association is infiltrating every organisation that might appear as a threat to their cause, including such luminaries as the RSPB and WWF, with the RNLI of all people being one of their latest converts. So I wonder how much interest Dr Brownsword really takes in wild land?

**David Bellamy**  
Builth Wells



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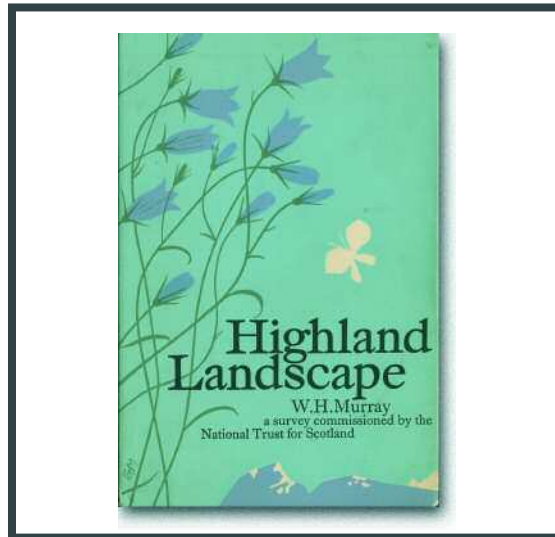
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## 'His single measure was beauty.'

W H Murray's 'Highland Landscape' revisited

by BOB AITKEN



**H**IGHLAND LANDSCAPE by W H Murray, published by the National Trust for Scotland in 1962, is a slim octavo volume of just 80 pages, in a cover of pale blue adorned with a vaguely art-deco design of harebells. Astonishingly, given its subject matter, it contains not a single photograph. But this reticent little book has exerted a profound and sustained influence on the conservation of landscape in Scotland.

At one level, *Highland Landscape* is no more than a consultancy report: the remit was 'to delineate areas of outstanding natural beauty, to report on the distinguishing characteristics of these areas, and to assess change'. To that end Bill Murray scrutinised 52 regions of the mainland Highlands, identifying 21 as of outstanding quality. But two factors conspired to ensure that this was a consultancy report of exceptional significance. One was its context; the other its quality.

First was the contemporary context. By 1961 the 'heroic age' of hydro-electric development, with an irresistible dynamism based in part on ideals of post-war social justice for the Highlands, had transformed swathes of the Central and Western Highlands by dams, roads and pylon lines. Its tendrils were reaching out to absorb remaining glories such as Glen Nevis and the wild country of the Fionn-Fada north of Loch Maree. The Forestry Commission too, in a single-minded drive to productive plantation forestry, was acquiring, and carpeting with Sitka, huge tracts of open upland country. Proposals were afoot for major road

improvements across the Highlands, including new roads to close notorious gaps, as round Loch Moidart and from Shieldaig to Torridon. Countryside planning and conservation were virtually unknown concepts. At that time, in that context, NTS were in no doubt that commissioning *Highland Landscape* to assert the value of landscape, and to show that too much of quality had already been damaged or lost, was an audacious act.

The second and enduring factor is the sublime talent of Bill Murray. He made no effort to arrive at objective criteria for landscape quality; his single measure was beauty – in almost a Keatsian sense, of beauty as truth. Any quibble as to the subjectivity of that approach is overwhelmed by the lucid analytical judgement he brought to the assessment of his 21 regions, and by the superb landscape descriptions in which he drew out their distinctive character. Much quoted ever since, Murray's evocations have the essential art of enhancing our own perceptions of the landscape he describes.

The effect of *Highland Landscape* was not dramatic, but it has been pervasive. With Tom Weir's campaigning against the Nevis scheme, and

with wider economic and political forces, it helped to dam the flood of hydro development. It became part of a swelling wave of conservation awareness that led in 1967 to the creation of the Countryside Commission for Scotland. When the Commission struggled to pioneer convincing techniques for objective landscape classification, it ultimately fell back on a subjective evaluation in which the influence of *Highland Landscape's* descriptions shines out. That is the underpinning of our current system of National Scenic Areas.

The core message of *Highland Landscape* is set out in one carefully measured overview statement: *The outstanding beauty of the Highland scene, which is one of the nation's great natural assets, has been haphazardly expended and no account kept.*

That may have been written 45 years ago, but it applies with dismaying force to our current situation, where the development of renewable energy is rampant across Scotland – to good ends perhaps, but at huge landscape cost. Assessing an ever-growing stream of single-site developments on a piecemeal basis, we fail to grasp the final aggregate impact at the national scale: we are still not keeping account of what we are losing. Almost by neglect, we are sacrificing the sublime beauty and wildness of our landscape, which Bill Murray asserted with such clear-sightedness and measured passion.

● *Bob Aitken – JMT member 13 – is a freelance consultant and lecturer in countryside management and conservation.*

**We would like to revisit other classic texts. Suggestions? – contact the editor, details on page 1.**